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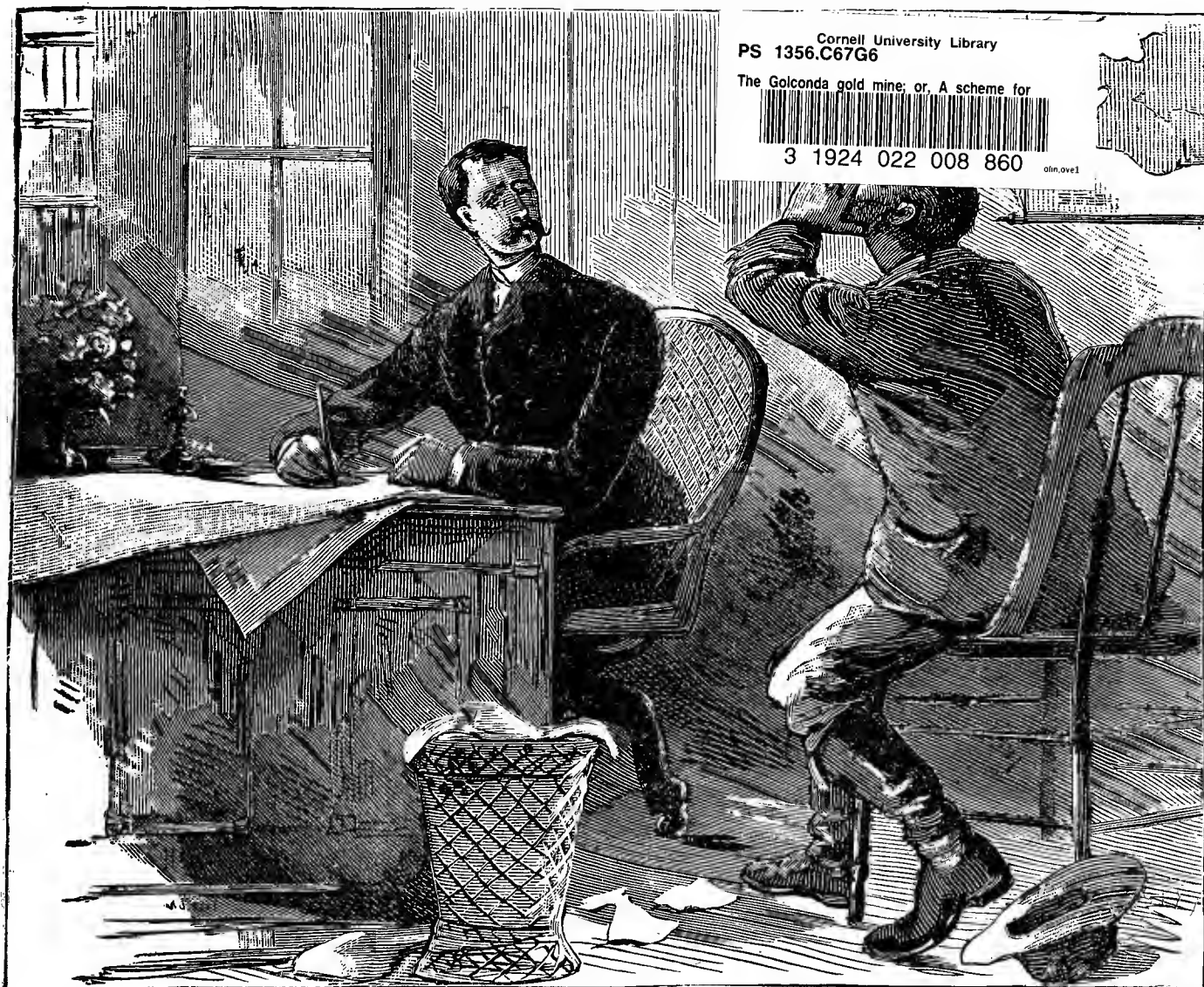
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VOL. II.

The Golconda Gold Mine; or, A Scheme for Millions.

BY WELDON J. COBB.

"The best-laid plans are not always successful."



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The Golconda gold mine; or, A scheme for



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"Ship scuttled, and the mine is ten feet under water."

THE GOLCONDA GOLD MINE;

—OR—

A Scheme for Millions.

"The best-laid plans are not always successful."

BY WELDON J. CONN.

CHAPTER I.

FIGURING UP.

Morning in New York.

It is early dawn in the great metropolis. Here and there along the business thoroughfares of the mighty city, which, during the day, pulsate and quiver like throbbing arteries with the din and turmoil of a restless activity, no sign of life exists, except the occasional rumble of a vehicle or the steady tramp of the policeman on his rounds.

It is to a street located in the very heart of the city that we would conduct our readers this beautiful morning, and to the broad marble steps of a superb edifice bearing across its columned front the words:

"THE GOLCONDA MINING COMPANY,
of Alameda, California."

The plate windows, the thickly matted hall, the frosted interior lights and the rich, handsome carpets and chandeliers evince wealth, taste and prosperity.

There are counting-rooms and offices, private offices and reception-rooms, while the well-appointed apartments indicate a lavish expenditure pleasing to the eye and confidence-inspiring to the mind.

There is no trashy display, no "shop" reminiscences about the place, for the Golconda is reported wealthy and prosperous and at the high-tide of popularity.

It is not with the mining workings of the company that our story has to do, but with the president of the rich organization which has so suddenly sprung into notice, Cecil Vivian, and with his private secretary, Gould Dayton. A retrospective glance will be necessary to a proper understanding of the state of affairs upon the day which opens our story.

Two years previous Cecil Vivian had been left an orphan and the heir to a handsome fortune at the age of twenty-five.

Young, unmarried, and handsome, he at once became the lion of a social set, the reigning belle of which was Miss Ethel Wayne, the adopted daughter of a wealthy retired banker.

The acquaintance between the twain had ripened into affection and their engagement became a matter of public gossip.

Among the property left by old General Vivian to his son was a large tract of territory in California.

Gold having been found near this place, Vivian, Mr. Wayne and several others made a trip to the Golden State, examined the mines, and the result was the formation of the Golconda Mining Company, of Alameda, with a cash capital of five hundred thousand dollars.

The young capitalist placed all his ready means in the enterprise and became its president.

At the time of our tale, to all outward appearances the company was in a flourishing condition, and the prospect of an immense dividend soon to be made was apparently satisfactory to all concerned.

Upon acquiring the fortune left him by his father, Cecil Vivian had taken into his confidence and employ a man who claimed to be his half-cousin, Gould Dayton.

In his loneliness and grief the young man felt the want of a friend and counselor, and despite the fact that Dayton had never been known to his father, accepted him in his heart as a warm friend.

Dayton was forty years of age, and on the score of years well able to become a judicious and prudent adviser to his generous cousin, who little dreamed of the perfidy and treacherous nature of his dependent.

He gave him a position as private secretary, and indeed the moving spirit in the company was Gould Dayton, whose judgment was consulted and confidence invited in the minutest details of the company by its young and inexperienced president. He had access to the books of the company, carried on all private correspondence, and drew a fine salary for his efforts.

Early as the morning is, the private office of the president of the company is not untenant, nor are its occupants idle. Seated in an elegant arm-chair, with thoughtful eyes and pale features, is Cecil Vivian. Before him, on a table, is a large pile of papers, closely written, and covered with perplexing rows of figures, while opposite him, and busily engaged adding up an account, is his private secretary, Gould Dayton.

The shades of this apartment are drawn, the chandelier is lighted, and the remnants of cigars on the hearth and the half-empty bottle of wine on the table indicate that they have been thus engaged during the night.

"I have finished," said the secretary, abruptly, looking up and starting his companion from his deep reverie. "It is a grand thing we went over the books, and a still more fortunate event that the real condition of affairs is unknown to the public. The bank account is overdrawn thirteen thousand dollars, and the assessments on stock are paid in to the last dollar."

A shade of startled amazement crossed the young capitalist's brow.

"As bad as that?" he murmured.

"It is as I say."

"I knew we were running short in cash; in fact, considering the heavy expenses we have incurred, I do not marvel at it. The pay-rolls, transportation of miners and purchase of machinery for the past year have been run up to over a quarter million of dollars. There is no need of anxiety or fear, however," continued Mr. Vivian, with a forced expression of relief. "We must tide over the present month, and then—"

He paused suddenly as his eye caught the watching expression of his cousin's face. Was it imagination, or the workings of his brain, weary with the night's anxious vigil, that look of supreme triumph, mingled with deadly hate and vindictiveness? One flash, and then the calm lips serenely echoed:

"And then?"

"Why, then we shall be all right, of course. Why not, Gould? The machinery is all up, and our first remittance of gold will be here on to-day's steamer to brighten up the directors' eyes. We've sunk a fortune; we shall reap a princely harvest."

The secretary watched his enthusiasm with a half-sneer on his lips, a veiled venom in his basilisk eyes. Theo met his look, impatiently leaned forward a little, and said, in a grave tone of voice:

"I don't want to discourage or worry you, Vivian, but I believe in facing peril and averting it if possible. Seriously, we are in shallow water."

"I know it," replied his companion, in a subdued voice, his enthusiasm waning at the matter-of-fact tones of the secretary.

"Now, let us face the crisis boldly," said Dayton. "We have issued one hundred shares of stock now ruling above par at five thousand dollars each. We have drawn extensively on our bank credits, and no assessment dues are payable for nearly a full quarter. The mines, at last accounts, were at work, panning out well. Suppose there is a failure; suppose the steamer carrying our first consignment of gold miscarries—what then? I have concealed the truth from you, but fifty thousand dollars must be paid before noon to-day or our paper goes to protest."

A look of absolute horror spread over the face of the president.

"Do you mean this?" he gasped, growing white and more startled.

"It is true."

"Why did you not tell me this before?"

"I did not know how short we were until I went over the books."

The young man lifted his hand to his brow, with an uncertain, dazed expression of face.

"There are my private bonds," he said, finally.

"Hypothecated for their full value. Our securities are all in use," replied the secretary.

"Then we must wait until we receive news from the steamer."

"Impossible."

"How impossible?"

"The Commercial Bank holds our paper for fifty thousand."

"Renew the loan."

"It has been intimated that the money must be called in."

"Then what do you advise?"

The secretary drew his chair near to his companion, his eyes watching every movement of his cousin's face.

"We're in a close box," he said, slowly; "but if we can keep the truth from the

public for a few weeks longer we are safe. One whisper now, one suspicion, and crash goes the company. Prudence demands a sacrifice which honor may refuse; but what is this to the ruin of the men who have trusted you? We will not fail; the mines must pay, but we must have time."

Cecil Vivian had looked up, startled and perplexed, at the hidden insinuation in his secretary's last words.

"I do not understand you," he said, confusedly.

"I mean there is but one way out of the difficulty."

"And that is—"

The wily conspirator drew closer to his unsuspecting tool and whispered in a low, hoarse murmur:

"An overissue of stock!"

A cry of amazement, mingled with horror and anger, rang from the pale lips of Cecil Vivian as he arose to his feet.

"Never!" he cried. "Ruin may come, but dishonor never!"

It was more like the cry of a tortured and ensnared soul repelling an awful temptation than the indignation of a proud and sinless spirit.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLOTTERS.

The human mind in unexpected dilemmas is marvelously active in its workings, and in that one moment of surprise and emotion Cecil Vivian seemed to realize the entire import conveyed in the words of his secretary.

It meant dishonor if detected, and, worst of all, it meant ruin, irretrievable ruin, if not done, and no other avenue of escape from his present financial embarrassment presented itself.

"Never," he had said, but the wily cousin knew better and kept silent.

"Do you know what it involves?" inquired Vivian, pacing the floor and addressing no one in particular in his present disordered mental condition.

"We have reached our limit, and if a single certificate is issued and placed upon the market fraudulently, the penalty is imprisonment in the state penitentiary."

A cunning gleam came into the secretary's eyes.

"But if we redeem the issue in a few days—in fact, if we save ourselves and no one knows of the transaction, what then?"

The wavering conscience was partially quieted.

"It cannot be done," murmured the president.

"It can."

"How?"

"Listen to me," said Dayton, and his tone became persuasive as he spoke. "The value of our mines has been placed as high as five million dollars. The stock issued already has amounted to five hundred thousand dollars. In your private desk you have blanks which may be filled out for five thousand a share. Sign ten of these certificates and give them to me. I will affix the seal of the company and my signature as secretary. Then I will take the stocks to old Isaacs. From their appearance he will never know what the conditions of their issue are. I will pledge them with him for fifty thousand dollars, payable in thirty days, and by that time we can redeem them, and who is the wiser?"

The president's face became more hopeful, but a slight cloud of indecision and reluctance still lingered upon it.

"Besides," pursued the wily conspirator, "there is no criminality in the act and no publicity. What is the deception practiced on the Jew, which he will never discover, compared to the loss of a fortune for the want of a paltry fifty thousand dollars?"

"Can you do this?" queried Cecil, anxiously. "Can the matter be arranged so that no whisper of it will get abroad?"

"It can."

An irresolute expression still haunted the thoughtful eyes of the young president.

"I will think this over, Gould," he said. "I will let you know this afternoon."

"This afternoon will be too late," said the secretary. "Now is the time. The blanks are in your desk. Sign ten of them, and I will attend to the rest."

He started up as he spoke.

A shadow, leaning in a listening attitude over the ground-glass doors in the next apartment, attracted his attention.

He frowned slightly, and then turned his full attention upon his cousin, who sat nervously playing with a pen-holder from the desk before him.

"Well?" he asked, eagerly.

The young capitalist laughed uneasily.

"One would believe that you were an evil genius leading me to the commission of some crime," he said, triflingly. "I will do it, however; but only under the pressure of the necessity which exists."

The eyes of the secretary burned triumphantly as he saw his victim open a drawer in the desk and take therefrom a bundle of blank certificates.

He watched the nervous fingers sign the name, and then, taking them one by one, affixed the company's seal and his own name.

There they lay on the table, ten certificates ready for use. The president arose with a weary sigh.

"Heaven grant that we hear from the mines to-day," he said. "I am very tired, and will go home to seek rest. This all-night business wears on me."

He lit a cigar, donned his light overcoat and hat as he spoke and left the office.

The secretary watched him as he descended the steps of the building, saw him turn the street corner, and then, locking the door, flung himself into a seat with a demoniac expression of triumph upon his evil face.

"It is done," he muttered, exultantly.

A low tap on the glass door connecting with the next room caused him to start suddenly and unlock the door.

A man entered—a man whose features and form bore so strange a resemblance to Cecil Vivian that they would scarcely be distinguishable apart in a dimly lighted room.

If the expression of the face differed materially, only a person familiar with Cecil Vivian would have discerned this peculiarity.

The young man entered with a weary yawn and threw himself into a seat before the desk just deserted by the president.

"Tired of waiting, Dacre?" inquired the secretary.

"Yes. You've had a mighty long confab, and I've had a good sleep. Well, is the game ready to be played?"

"Yes."

"I watched the latter part of your business through the window yonder," said the new-comer, with a nod toward the glass doors. "You've roped him in. Now for orders. I say, Dayton, have you any liquor in the place?"

The secretary took a bunch of keys from the drawer in the table and left the room.

At that moment the manner of the man Dacre changed. His eyes roved quickly over every article of furniture in the room, finally resting on the open drawer of the president's private desk. There lay the balance of the unsigned certificates.

It is impossible to say what thought crossed the man's mind at that moment. He quickly inserted his hand into the drawer, drew out ten blank bonds of the company, and after placing the company's stamp upon them, rolled them rapidly up and secreted them in his inner coat-pocket.

The secretary returned with a bottle of whisky brought from a secret closet, and when his companion had drank a glass said:

"We understand each other, Dacre, and it is not necessary to remind you that I hold your safety and liberty in my power. Your very remarkable resemblance to my cousin suggested my using you as a party to a little plot of mine, and I propose to pay you well for your trouble. Only one stipulation I make. You are to take those ten shares of stock, leave this office within an hour, and after banking-houses have opened, present them as I direct to the various banks written on this piece of paper. Attempt in every way to imitate the manner and tone of the man you are to represent—Cecil Vivian. Offer the shares at seventy-five cents on the dollar. Send the money to me at once, reserving ten thousand dollars as your share. Then do as I directed. Hire a conveyance, get the woman you spoke of to accompany you on a ride, passing Mr. Wayne's residence slowly, and you are ready for your trip to Europe. You understand your part thoroughly?"

"I do, but—"

A shadow crossed the young man's face.

"But what?"

"Mabel—"

Gould Dayton uttered a fierce oath.

"I tell you, you must leave that woman alone."

The other's face grew sullen and down-cast.

"You fly high game, Gould Dayton," he said, moodily, "and expect all the booty and none of the risk. Mabel Clare does not love

you and never will, and you have avowed your indifference to her. Why, then, this jealousy of me? Take your money and request any favor of me, but give me the woman I love."

A hot flush mounted the brow of the secretary, a deadly glitter came into his eyes.

"I forbid you to see Mabel Clare," he said, hotly, almost furiously. "She is not for you, and if I choose to shut out all other affections and bestow my friendship upon her, you must be content with no explanation of the mystery existing between us. Do my work and take your money, and seek forgetfulness of your hopeless passion in other climes."

The young man, Arnold Dacre, did not reply, but taking up the stock and list placed them in the outer pocket of his coat. Then he moodily drank another glass of the liquor and left the office.

He almost stumbled over a man who was near the door, and who brushed past him and entered the private room of the president unceremoniously as the other left it.

He was a roughly dressed man of middle age.

He closed the door after him and stood facing Gould Dayton, who had turned, with a startled cry, from the desk upon which he was arranging the papers, when the footsteps of the stranger announced a new arrival.

"You?" he said, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, it is me, boss; why not? Orders is orders, and you wrote to come on at once."

"Well, Jones," he said, patronizingly, "from the mines, I suppose?"

A quick look passed over the face of the other as his glance wandered over the secretary's face. He was evidently puzzled at the cool reception he had not expected to meet with.

"Yes, sir, from the mines and—"

He lifted his hands to his mouth as he spoke, in the shape of a speaking-trumpet. Then he threw his head back, and a sound like the gurgling of water proceeded from his hoarse throat. Coolly winking he eyed his companion askance.

If the secretary understood this sign he did not evince the least evidence that such was the fact, but coolly knocking the ashes from his cigar said:

"What does that mean, Jones?"

"Ship's scuttled."

A look of questioning innocence and amazement passed over the secretary's face, hiding the cunning gleam of triumph which had momentarily preceded it.

"Scuttled? What do you mean?"

There came an expression into the bronzed face of the stranger at this assumption of ignorance on the part of his companion which fairly startled Gould Dayton. It was the look of a man incensed, entrapped, puzzled, combined with an expression of the capabilities for resenting wrong or balking in a summary manner.

"Mr. Gould Dayton," he said, "I've heard of fellers high-toned as yerself luring uneducated pals like me to do their dirty work, but I never heard that they did not pay a man for his honest labor. Come, now, the agreement was to pay on delivery. The ship's scuttled, the gold was never shipped, and the mine's ten feet under water. I don't know your object. I don't care. All I want is my money. Atween Rio and the Horn I scuttled the ship; no lives lost; and the iron ore gone to the bottom. What then? Accordin' to agreement, five thousand cash."

"See here, my man," said the secretary, coolly, suavely, "are you wild or drunk? What have I to do with the scuttling of the ship, the shipment of iron ore, or the plot or plan you are hinting at?"

A coarse oath broke from the lips of the miner.

"Did yer or did yer not hire me to leave New York and go to the mines?"

"I certainly did."

"Correct. Did yer or did yer not tell me that ef I obeyed the orders of yer right-bower, Arnold Dacre, I was to hev money?"

"Yes, that is substantially true, also."

"That's what I've done, boss. First, floodin' the mines; second, puttin' the iron in place of the gold; last, scuttlin' the ship. What then?"

"What then?" cried Dayton, arising and flinging his cigar away. "I'll tell you, my friend. If you and Dacre have got up a game on me, lookout. If you think I'm to be blackmailed at your will and pleasure, take care. I repudiate you and him, too. There's a hundred dollars," flinging him a purse, "and now, if you ever come into this place again, if you ever so much as dare to

hint even at what you have said, I'll have you put where you won't see daylight for a time."

The miner arose to his feet, spurning the gold contemptuously, white, trembling, with murderous eyes and evil face.

Rage, baffled avarice, and a gleam of demoniac hatred sprung into his features as his hand clutched a revolver at his belt.

He paused in his sudden impulse, however, for the finger of the secretary rested on a little electric knob connecting with the police headquarters, and he saw what it meant.

"I'll go, you devil, you sneak and villain!" he cried. "I'll leave ye, my friend, but beware. When you sleep I'll be awake; when you're in fancied safety I'll be plotting, and I'll tear you down. I'll trump your best card if it takes my life."

Then he turned and was gone ere the secretary could stop him, leaving Gould Dayton in a state of doubt, indecision and fear which blanched his cheek and filled him with the conviction that he had made a dangerous and unrelenting enemy.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE NAME OF THE LAW.

Of all dark schemes that had for their purpose the destruction of the integrity, the love and the social status of an apparently innocent man, that of Gould Dayton against his unsuspecting cousin was the blackest and direst.

To crush him; to alienate him from the love of a faithful and tender heart; to degrade him in the eyes of the community and win for him the opprobrium and punishment of a common criminal, he had conceived and partially executed a plot which could not fail of success, so carefully had it been projected, so faithfully carried out by his auxiliaries.

Arnold Dacre would not fail to carry out his agreement, and the wily conspirator had of late not only poisoned the minds of many against his cousin by vile innuendoes and careless but damaging insinuations as to his habits, but had managed to have these reports reach the ears of Miss Wayne.

Too proud was she to question further, as she had the fullest confidence in her lover's integrity and honor, and while these reports failed to convince her of the unfaithfulness of her betrothed, yet they prepared her mind for the stunning proofs of Cecil Vivian's unworthiness with which she was so soon and unexpectedly to be confronted.

Ethel Wayne was the adopted and only child of Mr. Wayne.

Years before he had found her, a child of three years of age, upon a cold winter's night, homeless and friendless, with no clew to her real identity, and had taken her to his lonely home, and as she grew up her beauty of face and character had well repaid him for the love he had lavished upon her.

Daily unfolding new beauties of soul, she had entranced and captivated both Cecil Vivian and his cousin, Gould Dayton; but while the former inspired her with a deep and pure affection, the latter filled her with an aversion and repugnance she could not avoid exhibiting in his presence at all times.

The result was a natural one; the engagement of Cecil and the lady in question, and jealousy and a feeling of hatred for his successful rival on the part of Gould Dayton.

Upon the afternoon of the day which ushers in our story Ethel was seated in the wing of Mr. Wayne's house devoted to the library, when looking up from the book she was perusing she saw passing the house slowly in an elegant vehicle her lover, as she supposed, Cecil Vivian.

At first she thought herself mistaken, but a second view satisfied her that it could be no other than he.

By his side, gaudy with bright attire and flashing jewels, with rouged cheeks and painted face, was a woman, a bold, brazen-faced thing, whose every gay gesture and smile told of an abandon and recklessness habitual only to one class of women.

The hot blood flushed the face of Ethel Wayne with indignation as she recognized the open insult offered her, and she burst into a flood of tears.

An hour passed, when she was aroused from her fit of sad meditations by the sound of voices in the hall, and she started up pale and agitated as Mr. Wayne entered the room, followed by Gould Dayton evidently laboring under some intense excitement.

"Impossible, Mr. Dayton!" Ethel's father was saying.

"It is as I say, Mr. Wayne. Excuse me, sir; Miss Wayne is present."

He noticed with satisfaction the scarcely dried tears on her face, the pale features, the agitated manner.

"Remain, Ethel," commanded the old man, sternly.

"Consider her feelings, Mr. Wayne," interposed the wily hypocrite; "the news may be too severe for her."

"My Ethel is a true woman," returned the capitalist, proudly. "She knows how to accept and treat the unmasked swindler as readily as her friends. Ethel, I have painful news for you. Cecil Vivian is a fugitive from justice—a common swindler. He has made an overissue of stock of the company of which he is president, and has misrepresented the affairs of the company to the public."

"Oh! it cannot be!"

There was a gasp of pain, a white horror in the fair young girl's face, and then, as Gould Dayton sprang forward, she sunk to the sofa, withdrawing herself from his willing grasp and placing her handkerchief to her eyes.

"The discovery came at noon, sir," continued Dayton to Mr. Wayne. "The ship Arizona has sunk in mid-ocean with the first consignment of gold from the mines aboard; and late intelligence from California states that over ten feet of water have flooded the mines, involving a loss of thousands of dollars and a consequent delay for future operations which will deteriorate the value of the property. The news spread like wildfire and the stock is offered for sale at any price. In fact, the company is a total wreck."

The old man listened with a white face and trembling lips.

"I do not care for the fifty thousand dollars I have invested in the company and will probably lose," he said. "It is yonder poor, crushed girl's condition which grieves me. To think that she should have been engaged to a common swindler, for such he is. The finger of disgrace which points out his fall will reflect scorn upon her. Cheer up, my poor child," he said, tenderly, turning to his daughter. "It is well we ascertained in time the character of the man whom you were to have wedded."

A low mean was her only reply. Utterly crushed, the events of that fated hour had bent the gentle spirit like a frail flower in the storm.

"Whether Mr. Vivian intended to flee the country I know not," pursued the secretary, slowly. "I know that the affairs of the company show a sad discrepancy between the real and publicly stated condition of things. The overissue is in itself bad enough, but the forgery of my name makes it infinitely worse."

"Did he do that?"

"He did. If I could shield him I would, but I cannot bear the odium of complicity when none existed."

At that moment a servant opened the door and announced:

"Mr. Vivian!"

At the mention of that name Mr. Wayne turned red and angry.

Dayton shrunk into the shadow of the curtain, while Ethel, pale but composed, faced him sternly.

He entered the apartment full of life and vivacity, with no knowledge of the blow which had fallen, of the terrible odium which the events of the past few hours had attached to his name.

The glad smile on his face was checked and a presentiment of evil came into his mind as he glanced from the stern face of Mr. Wayne to the pale, sad features of his fiancée.

"Ethel! Mr. Wayne!" he ejaculated, in surprise, "what has happened? What means this agitation?"

"What does it mean?" cried the old man, placing a detaining hand between the two lovers. "It means, sir, that you have forfeited all claim to our friendship and respect by your conduct. How dare you pollute a gentleman's house with your presence or insult its inmates while the street is ringing with the story of your shame?"

"Shame!" echoed the young man in surprise. "Strange words, Mr. Wayne."

"And true ones, sir. Do you deny the rumors about concerning your swindling operations—the overissue of stocks and their sale at a ruinous sacrifice?"

A chill struck the heart of the young man as he realized the meaning of the coldness of Mr. Wayne, of the silence of his daughter.

The stocks had been sold, then, and the news had spread abroad.

His manner indicated that there was some foundation for the charges made, and Ethel Wayne, with a low cry, sunk her head on her father's shoulder.

"Ethel, my darling!" cried the young man, springing forward, distressed beyond measure at this exhibition of her sorrow, and catching her hand in his own, "listen to me. I may have consented to the overissue of stocks, but only to save the company."

"Silence, sir! Do not touch me!" cried the maiden, raising her arm and flinging aside his hand, while with head erect and flashing eyes she confronted him. "Dare you stand in my presence after committing the crime which has brought disgrace and dishonor to you and grief and shame to me? Never enter this house again; never approach me with hollow mockeries of affection, for the man who can descend to the level of the swindler and the forger is beneath any true woman's love."

He bent his white face as if a blow had struck him. He stood self-accused before her, and as she swept from the room it seemed to him as if life and hope had gone with her. In a dazed, mechanical way he walked through the open door-way out into the hall and down the marble steps into the street.

Had Dayton led him into a trap? Had the story of the stocks by some fearful error got abroad, or was it a dream?

As he moved on he saw nothing, heard nothing, until he had walked he knew not how far.

A crowd had stopped the thoroughfare before him and were reading the bulletin of an evening paper posted conspicuously in the window.

He looked up and started into consciousness as he read the lines in black, announcing his own doom, for the bulletin read:

STARTLING DEVELOPMENTS!

THE GOLCONDA GOLD-MINING COMPANY,
OF ALAMEDA, A WRECK!

Its Mines Fleeced, its Bullion Lost at Sea,
and its Stock Worthless!

The President is a Defaulter and a Fugitive
from Justice!

He turned from the spot with a suppressed cry of amazement, doubt and horror.

Was it true, or a dream?

He started as a hand touched his shoulder, and raising his wee-haunted eyes he stood face to face with a neatly dressed, professional-looking man.

"Mr. Cecil Vivian?" he said.

He bowed mutely.

"I arrest you in the name of the law," he said slowly as he took his arm.

The young man looked at him confusedly, dazedly.

"Arrest me?" he repeated, slowly.

"Yes."

"Upon what charge?"

"Swindling and forgery."

He allowed the man to lead him on.

He had a dim idea of a curious, pressing, looking crowd, of a hurried drive in a close carriage, of a brief few minutes in a dark, unwholesome office, of a clanking of iron doors, and then, as he realized that there were iron bars shutting out the view from without and iron doors the light from within, he sunk unconscious on a wooden seat—a prisoner.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INTERCEPTED LETTER.

A man in jail is a man in a tomb.

It has been said that riches in a reformatory or corrective institution purchase immunity for the wealthy captive and bring to him many little attentions and delicacies not vouchsafed to the poor prisoner.

Cecil Vivian found that in his especial case every prison-rule was strictly adhered to.

The peculiarity of his case, his inability to command bail, his utter desertion by his former friends, emanated from a source he little dreamed of.

Not satisfied with all the evil he had worked, Gould Dayton had systematically furnished the press and public with statements entirely false and calculated to traduce his character.

It was only when he had sent for Gould Dayton and had an interview with him

that Cecil Vivian realized the true depths of the man's villainy.

It was the day after his arrest, and he was seated in a dejected attitude in his prison cell, when he heard the outer door of the corridor of cells open, and a minute later he looked up as his name was called, to find Gould Dayton standing at the door of his cell.

"You, Gould!" ejaculated the prisoner, awakening from his moodiness and gloom into attention and interest as he saw his visitor. "I am glad you have come."

From the first he noticed a constrained manner in his cousin's bearing.

He did not magnify the change in his appearance into anything important until the latter said coolly:

"You are in a bad box, Cecil. Your own judgment should have taught you better than to attempt the wholesale fraud you undertook."

"Fraud!" echoed Vivian. "I tell you, Gould, I do not understand these allusions. I am treated as a common felon, and on charges utterly without foundation, and am not even allowed to send for my friends. The overissue of the stocks was bad enough, but the charges of forgery and swindling, as you know, are utterly unfounded."

"I know nothing of the kind," bluntly replied the secretary. "You may play that game before the court, but it won't go down with me. The ten certificates you gave me I handed to a friend to negotiate as agreed upon. Those bonds have entirely disappeared, and in their place ten consecutive certificates having entirely different numbers have been sold to the banks."

"From me!" ejaculated Cecil, in amazement.

"Yes; the cashier swears positively to the fact of your individuality. I accuse you of nothing, Cecil, but it looks bad for you."

"Why, I was at home the entire day and in bed!" exclaimed the prisoner. "So far from being abroad, I had just left home when I was arrested, having only called at Mr. Wayne's house. You know this to be a fact, Gould."

A perplexing anxiety began to evince itself in the young man's face.

"I know what you say, that only. These men positively swear to your presenting the stocks, and my signature is a forgery."

The president started as if a shot had struck him.

"Gould," he said, "are you in a plot against me, or what is the mystery of this affair? If the stocks, running from one hundred and one to one hundred and ten inclusive, have not been presented on the market, before my Maker I swear that I am innocent of any crime. Under your instigation I signed these papers; beyond that I know nothing of these you refer to."

The secretary was silent, and at that moment, a turnkey entering, the interview terminated, Dayton agreeing to endeavor to secure bail for his cousin, and to send him his dressing-case and other necessities.

He never called again.

The case came to trial and the prisoner pleaded not guilty.

It was a case which interested every one and involved the employment of considerable legal talent, and although every effort was made to prove an *alibi* on the part of the prisoner, the evidence against him was overwhelming.

Two bank cashiers swore distinctly to his appearance, and to the purchase of the stocks from him.

Experts made affidavits to the fact that the signature of the secretary was a forgery. In vain the president explained and argued; the case was dead against him, and he was adjudged guilty and sentenced on two separate charges to penal servitude for fifteen years.

It was upon the trial that Gould Dayton manifested to his cousin the depth of perfidy and villainy of which he was capable.

He never went near his unfortunate cousin in jail, and while he marveled at the substitution of the stocks for the original ones and pondered deeply over this mystery, he knew in his inmost heart that Cecil Vivian was innocent; and so it became a nine-days' talk, and then gossip allowed some other equally strange matter to take precedence, and the young financier disappeared from public view within the walls of a prison.

Ethel, in the face of such overwhelming evidence of the criminality of her lover, was well-nigh heart-broken.

Poverty or loss of friends never could have turned the pure-minded girl from her love for him, but dishonor she shrunk from.

She could not retain in her mind a respect

for the man who had trampled upon the truth and set society at open defiance.

Tearfully and despairingly she laid down her love, and met the world with half the sweetness of life gone.

Had she ever received the letter which Cecil Vivian had written to her upon the day which found him a condemned man she might have gone to his side and comforted him in his loneliness and distress.

He had written her a letter, telling her everything and beseeching her to come to him ere he was sent to his prison home.

She never came, and the weary heart, overburdened and feeling at enmity with all mankind, hardened like the unimpassible heart of a stoic.

The keen eyes of the secretary had seen Vivian hand a letter to a boy to mail upon the evening when an adverse decision was reached in his case.

To prevent its reaching its destination he would risk everything.

He followed the messenger from the courtroom, watched him approach the letter-box and drop the missive into it.

He consulted his watch; it was 6:30 p. m., and the last evening mail had been collected from the boxes. Then his eyes lighted with a demoniac expression as he hit upon a plan to prevent the delivery of the letter to the lady for whom it was intended, for he intuitively divined that it was for Ethel Wayne.

He repaired to a drug store, ordered several articles and went to his room to arrange the infernal machine which was to destroy the letter and its companions in the letter-box.

At nine o'clock that night he went to the vicinity of the box, and at a moment when no one seemed to be observing him dropped an oblong object into the slit in the receptacle for letters, first applying his cigar to a fuse which protruded from one end of the mysterious package.

Then he turned quickly from the spot, crossed the road, and stood in the shadow of a door-way awaiting the result of his scheme.

There was a pause, a dull report within the little box, and then satisfied that within a few minutes the letters contained in it would be a mass of cinders he hastened from the spot.

As started as, turning the corner of the street, he came face to face with a man whose eyes glittered and glowed upon him as he passed him with menacing significance.

Both men went on their way, but the secretary felt a vague fear at his heart as he recognized in the lurid eye and evil face of the man the miner, Tom Jones.

On the trail, sure enough; on the track of the man who had lured him to sin and left him uncompensated.

The rough miner, in carrying out his own schemes of vengeance, was unconsciously aiding the successful exposition of the plot against the life itself of Cecil Vivian.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE PRISON.

Cecil Vivian was conducted to prison.

To the delicately nurtured child of fortune and refinement this life had horrors unknown to those of coarser mold.

The prison-rot sickened and disgusted him with an existence the monotony and dreariness of which appalled him and filled him with thoughts of suicide.

He never noticed a man who entered the prison about one year after he had been sent there.

It was Tom Jones, the miner, but he had never seen him before and did not know him now.

He observed the white pallor of the man's face when he first saw him, but prison rule prevented any conversation, although he was startled one day by being called 'Dacre' by the new prisoner.

The presence of a guard interrupted any further conversation, and Vivian, with a perplexed air, resumed his labor at the work-bench.

There was another man who, of all that motley gang, the prisoner had noticed and evinced a genuine sorrow for. This was a gray-headed man of perhaps fifty years, whose lines of sorrow on his broad, intellectual forehead and care-worn features bespoke a suffering the sentiment of which precluded the idea of any innate baseness.

Often the magnetic eyes had met those of Vivian, and there was a tacit although unexpressed friendship existing between them.

At seven o'clock every evening the huge

wooden doors were closed over the interior iron frames, and from that moment until six the following morning the prisoners were kept in solitary seclusion, with no light save that which penetrated the diamond-shaped hole in the doors, or such as was afforded by the moon or stars through their barred windows.

Cecil Vivian had often marked out a presumptive course of escape if the opportunity ever presented itself, but he never schemed to perfect such a plan through his own unaided efforts.

In the prison he was known as No. 93. His name was never called from the day he entered its doors.

Upon his breast, in blue worsted figures, was sewed the number he went by—93.

The prisoner in the next cell adjoining that of Vivian, however, was known through the prison by name, being referred to as Colonel Andre, the murderer.

The doors of the cells had been closed fully half an hour one evening, and silence reigned within the huge dormitory of the prison, when Cecil Vivian's attention was attracted from observing the distant moonlit waters without, and sadly meditating over the lost past, by three distinct knocks upon the stone partition separating his cell from the one adjoining.

Among prisoners, commonly at war with the keepers of a jail, and ever willing to conceal anything from them and to aid and abet a fellow-prisoner, a signal is a sufficient reason for attention.

The knocking continued at intervals, night after night, until he was not a little surprised to observe a piece of hard mortar drop from its crevice, followed immediately thereafter by the moving of a stone, and then in an instant the truth flashed upon his mind.

Colonel Andre, the so-called murderer, his next-cell companion, had penetrated the wall between their cells, and the supposition on the part of Vivian was soon verified as the block of stone was pushed from its place, followed by a human head.

"Hist!" came in a low tone.

He placed his head near the aperture and looked. There was the pale face before him, the well-known features of the colonel.

He held in his hand a chisel with which he had made the embrasure, and half leaning through he spoke in a low tone of voice:

"Lay down upon your bunk with your head near the holes so the guards may not see me if they suspect anything. I have something of importance to both you and myself to tell."

The young man obeyed him mechanically, coolly, his quiet composure of manner contrasting strangely with the nervous tremulousness of the other, who, resuming a recumbent posture, bent half way through the breach made in the partition, and said in a low, trembling tone of voice:

"The tools I have used in communicating with you I obtained a month since. I have cut the bars at my window and could have escaped a week ago. I have used the utmost caution in my work. Do you know why I did not escape at once—why I have risked this much, all my chance of escape, perhaps, by thus delaying and breaking through to you?"

The young man moved his head negatively. "Because," went on the colonel, in a hurried, agitated manner, "I want you to escape with me."

"I! do you mean this?"

A new light broke in upon the prisoner's mind, a new hope set his pulse throbbing wildly, his heart beating with the same anxious turbulence which his companion evinced.

"Hist!" cried the other warningly. "One loud word and all our plans may fail. Yes, I offer you a chance for freedom, but I demand a reward."

"Any honorable return I can make you, be sure I will do," said the young man eagerly.

"I know it. I was sure of it. Listen to me, No. 93. Since I first saw you, of all the men I have ever seen your face attracted me. Your honest, pitying glance inspired me with confidence in you. You believe me innocent. Nay, I can read you. You at least deem me the victim of circumstances. I can read extenuation of my crime in your face. I can see that you too are a wronged man."

"You are not known here, save as 93. Your name is a mystery to every man in this prison; mine is a distinctive title. I am called a murderer, and the future has many risks for me. With much to accomplish if I regain my liberty, do you wonder that I seek

an assistant—that I offer you freedom with the promise that you aid me in the execution of two of the most powerful motives which actuate the human heart—love and vengeance?"

"I trust you, my friend, and I am going to tell you my story. Then if you accede to my request we join lots and endeavor to escape; if not, then I go alone, with no hindrance on your part. Is this understood?"

The young man bowed his head assentingly.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BRETHREN OF THE BLOOD.

"If my story is not a long one," continued the man, keeping the same watchful air for any sound on the outside, "it is as strange a one as you ever heard. I shall tell it to you simply as a man would divulge a secret to a stranger to whom some irresistible attraction had drawn him—whose manner had invited confidence, and whose honest soul shining in the eyes repelled any suspicion of a violation of that candor. I trust in you to retain my secret—more, I depend on you to assist me in unraveling a mystery, in defeating a possible crime, in establishing the rights of a woman whom I ask you to make your wife."

The young prisoner regarded his older companion pityingly. In his restless eyes he had insanity, in his manner the evidences of an honorable career misspent, perhaps the wasting of noble energies and a high order of intellect in pursuit of wealth or in some criminality. He listened quietly, however, as the former went on:

"My name is George Andre, and I won the title of colonel in the Mexican war. Born wealthy, I received a fine education, losing my father and mother, the latter at my birth, the former one year previous to my entering the army. I went through the Mexican war with a few slight wounds, and when I left the service, went with a score of others of my companions to Lower California, where it was reported vast deposits of gold had been found."

"In my travels thither I became acquainted on the way with a Spaniard named Don Alvarez Cervantes. We became friendly and familiar, although he was a much older man than myself. At his hacienda I remained for many weeks and there met and loved his beautiful daughter Inez."

"Among our party was a man whom all disliked and whom we had regarded with suspicion and aversion ever since his first joining us on our way to Old California. The don owned and operated extensive mining claims near his hacienda and the majority of our company remained there working in the mines for him or in the immediate vicinity on their own individual account. Marston, the man referred to, remained with them. Of his past history, save that he had been a sutler and speculator in our regiment, we knew nothing. One thing, however, impressed me strongly—he loved the Donna Inez."

"His openly expressed preference for the lady forced me to early measures, and I proposed for the heart and hand of the don's lovely daughter and received both. For one year we led a life of unalloyed bliss and then our little child, Portia, was born."

"Marston was sullen and unfriendly over my success in winning the hand of the senorita, and more than once I caught his eye fixed jealously and malignantly upon myself. I knew his evil nature would seek revenge, but I guarded against any sudden attack by exerting the utmost vigilance. It was in vain. Some secret influence was at work and the vengeance of the villain was consummated quickly and terribly."

"One by one the mines of the don were mysteriously flooded or ruined. His residence was burned, his stock poisoned, and although we suspected Marston of being at the bottom of all these iniquities, not the slightest clue could be obtained which would implicate him in the atrocities referred to. Finally, however, I resolved to watch him, individually, for I was positive that the destruction of the property of my father-in-law had been instigated or committed by him and his confederates, and I one evening traced him from the village to a rocky defile leading from the hacienda to a lonely portion of the mountains."

"It was a cloudless night with a crescent moon, and the exquisite starlight served to hide me in the distance as I followed his steps and to show his outline plainly as I sprang from tree to tree, from rock to rock."

"He was on horseback and I on foot, but

I kept the same distance steadily between us, he being unable to urge his horse to more than an ordinary trot over the rough and unfrequented mountain-road.

"At last he reached a point where the road made an abrupt divergence to the left and descended along a rocky cliff into a valley. Here, at a point where the gulch branched off into opposite directions, before a deep fissure in the rocks, he paused. I watched him curiously. He rolled a stone away from its place easily, and as he did so an aperture appeared leading into apparent darkness. Then he entered and disappeared from my view.

"I waited a few minutes and then boldly determined to advance into the secret of the cave, for I doubted not this was an entrance to it, and immediately crawled into the hole.

"There was a long, narrow, and low passage, gaining in height as I advanced and finally widening into a large room. In a niche in the rock was a spirit-lamp that, flaring up, cast a brilliant radiance over the roof and sides of the cavern, which were composed of glittering stalactites that hung pendant, reflecting a myriad of prismatic rays, varied and beautiful as those of the rainbow.

"I was lost in admiration of the scene when my eyes rested upon the second subterranean corridor leading from this cave, and supplied here and there with lamps placed in fissures of the solid rock evidently intended to light the way to some place still further in the mountain.

"I hastened on, noting that the pathway was well trodden and smooth until it came to a door made of solid forest wood, pendant on huge, frame hinges firmly imbedded in the rock. It yielded to my touch, swung open, and I had just time to spring into a dark recess to evade the notice of a dozen or more persons gathered in a semicircle in the vast cavern which I had so strangely entered.

"It was an Aladdin-like dream of beauty, wonderment and marvels.

"The cave was resplendent with magnificent rock crystals, reflecting a thousand varied hues from the light radiated toward them from perfumed lamps hung from the lofty ceiling.

"In the center of the place, perched upon a high platform of white, transparent stone, resembling gypsum or alabaster, was a figure hewn from solid rock, such as I had never seen before. It was a dark, forbidding representation of the Aztec god of dim tradition—Zeus Inflamma. I recognized it at once as the object of superstition, the worshiped divinity of a fanatic sect then dying out, called the Brethren of the Blood, whose devotees dwelt amid the ancient ruins of Mexico.

"In the center of the altar upon a pure white shield were other symbols in blood-red characters, and in the hand of the idol was a scepter of gold, upon the end of which, glaring and burning like a fiery sun, was an immense yellow diamond.

"It emanated such a flood of molten, liquid light, so subtle, so diffusive, that my eyes were almost blinded by the light of it. Of immense value, and doubtless ancient as the knowledge of the mountain itself which concealed it from the eyes of unbelievers, its votaries here worshiped the fiery symbol of their belief.

"I had heard of the order, had often wondered at their strange fidelity to their cause, and at once divined the secret influence of the villain. Marston was a member of the order.

"By what means he, a stranger, had been accepted as a member I know not. I only know that, seated there with the dark-skinned, burning-eyed remnant of a race almost extinct, he conversed with them in a pure dialect, simple and of but few words, and spoken very generally in Central America. I understood their conversation very thoroughly and I listened intently, every word sounding distinct and loud in the reverberating cavern.

"I have kept my promise, Brethren of the Blood," Marston was saying. "You have aided me in my plot against my rival, and I in return have delivered to you secrets of the army's movements, of the movements of its dispersed members in whom you see fit to be interested. I desire the Donna Inez and the death of my rival."

"It cannot be done," said one of the men, who, richly although quaintly attired, appeared to be a high-priest or other important official of the order. "Death can only be dealt out by Brethren of the Blood to its

direct enemies. This man you hate has done no overt act to entail such a doom."

"He is my enemy, and am I not a member of your order and a friend to all your movements?" replied Marston. "Of what avail is the burning of the don's hacienda, the poisoning of his flocks, the destruction of his mines and other property if he, my enemy, lives and the seniorita is not mine?"

"The Aztec was silent for a few minutes deeply engaged in looking over a roll of parchment he held in his hand. Finally he said:

"Brother, when you entered this order we promised mutual society and aid. We have extended it to you. Further than we have done we will not do. Let that suffice."

"A flush of anger, deep and uncontrollable, evinced the ready passion of the other.

"Beware!" he said, revealing his true spirit to the men about him. "Your secrets are—"

"He paused. Quick as thought the Aztec arose.

"Go!" he said, haughtily, pointing to the entrance of the cave. "For two centuries the secrets of this branch of the order have been vested within the knowledge of white and black, brown and red. Every race has known us, every station in society has represented us. Never has a traitor lived to enjoy the reward of his treachery. Widespread as the banyan-tree our order protects and watches. The symbols of it are potent to protect, powerful to watch, terrible to punish. Go! We renounce you as an unworthy hypocrite. Henceforth your every footstep will be watched, your every word heard, your doom inevitable."

"The villain arose with a sullen air and left the spot. I watched a favorable opportunity and also departed. That night the man disappeared, and for a year I never heard of him.

"To no human being did I divulge what I had seen in the cave. While I deplored the necessity which made them destroy our property, I knew these depredations would cease now that the selfish member of the order who had instigated them was an outcast from its benefits and privileges. I respected their sincerity and principles which forbade the useless shedding of blood, and lived a year of unalloyed happiness and bliss.

"One day I was hunting in the ravine where I had met with my singular adventure when I was suddenly startled by the appearance before me of a man in a strange Oriental garb, whom I at once recognized as one of the inmates of the cavern upon the night of my visit to the abode of their strange, inanimate but beloved deity.

"He was terribly excited, and was tearing his long, white, flowing beard and giving utterance to strange cries. I approached him and spoke to him in his own dialect.

"You are in distress," I said, kindly. "Nay, do not start from me, for I am a friend to you. What means this emotion upon the part of a worshiper of Zeus Inflamma?"

"The man started and turned his burning eyes upon me.

"Art thou, too, a member?" he inquired, making a singular challenging signal with his hand.

"Nay—a friend."

"Strange words are these of the race of our destroyers. Leave me to myself. Already your countrymen have robbed us of a jewel inestimable in value and ancient as our order."

"Ah, then Marston has robbed you!" I cried in amazed tones.

"Yes; dost thou know him?" eagerly inquired the man. "Listen, thou of the white face. This man thou speakest of was a member of our order. He proved a traitor and we dismissed him. By some surreptitious means he gained our cave this day and took with him from the scepter of our deity the mountain of flame—the yellow diamond of Atirza-Hujui, the originator of our sect. Aside from its intrinsic value the legend connected with it predicts blood, ruin and disaster to our order if lost. It is gone; it is stolen and there is mourning in our order."

"I was infinitely sorry. The man's rare simplicity of manner, the opportunity of making him a true friend of the don, made me resolve to assist him."

"Listen!" I said. "I know this man and I know you. I am a friend to you. I will follow him. I can penetrate where you might not, and I will try to return your stolen treasure."

"I left him, and with a noted trail-hunter

in the don's employ tracked Marston from station to station, from village to village. I overtook him at last. In a log grocery in Houston, surrounded by men whose revolvers never rested, whose knives never grew rusty, I placed the barrel of my pistol to his forehead and took the stone from him by force.

"I returned to the hacienda of my father-in-law.

"To describe to you the rapturous joy of the Aztecs when I returned the lost jewel to them would be to tell you of the most extravagant demonstrations of delight. They had invested the diamond with veritable magical attributes, and had believed all calamitous catastrophes would follow its appropriation.

"They loaded me with presents, promised me protection and aid at all times, and restored the flocks of Don Alvarez by new accessions of stock.

"They rebuilt the burned quarters and placed the mines in their original condition, besides paying large damages for their former depredations at the instigation of Marston.

"A third year went by, the villain never appearing. The Aztecs informed me that he would be doomed ere he ever appeared within their limits again.

"My father-in-law dying, we sold the hacienda and realized quite a fortune, resolving to repair to New York and invest in some business with my own funds, in bank at that point.

"One day the old chief of the Aztecs came to me bearing a little box. He then told me that as I was going away, and as the order owed me a lasting debt of gratitude, he desired to mark upon the arm of my only daughter, Portia, the mystic symbols of their order.

"They had resolved to thus impress the signs of the Brethren of the Blood, and when she was of age they would reward my friendship to them by presenting her with a royal present.

"I attempted to refuse. He was not to be put off, and the three symbols of the Brethren of the Blood were firmly impressed upon my child's right arm in indelible figures. He presented her with a singular necklace of precious stones and gold, and myself with a ring, all bearing reference to the order, took my address and bade me in affectionate farewell, first giving me a sealed letter to one Hayri, an astrologer in the city to which I was bound, requesting me to call upon him and deliver the letter if I ever was in trouble and needed assistance."

"As the man spoke he took from his hiding-place a curious circlet of gold, having for its setting a plain, polished agate-stone. As he touched a spring this flew back, revealing a cavity lined with gold, in the bottom of which appeared three mysterious signs in dark enamel, the symbols of the secret order of the Brethren of the Blood.

"Keep this ring," continued the colonel. "If you assent to my proposition it shall be yours."

"The young man took the ring while the convict resumed:

"The year following my arrival in New York City I lost my wife. I had removed to a little suburb and had engaged in business in the city. One day I came face to face with Marston. He never noticed me and I refrained from speaking to him; but from that moment my life became one of untold misery. Mysterious men followed me. Strange missives greeted me at every mail. I believed myself surrounded by an organized band of murderers and thieves in the employ of my vengeful rival.

"One day I returned to my home and met one of the spies near my house. For myself I cared not, but for my child. Ah! there he would strike! I felt convinced of it, and placed her in charge of a woman who resided in a secluded portion of the city. Then I set at work to sell my business and my property. I succeeded, but at such a sacrifice that I had but ten thousand dollars after the sale.

"To evade the evil machinations of my enemy I resolved to take my child and leave the country, seeking some quiet spot in Europe.

"The day before that upon which I had made arrangements to leave I received a note from Mrs. Harris, the lady who had charge of my child. Portia was lost or stolen.

"In my rage and certainty that this fiend, Marston, had a hand in it, I sought him out. I was so excited that I did not notice two men—roughs of the lowest order—following me, doubtlessly attracted by my rich watch-

chain and guard, carelessly displayed in my intense excitement.

"It was dark when I reached the place of his abode. I found him in his room with a friend engaged at a game of cards. I charged him with stealing my child. He denied the charge. We had hot words, in which he and his friend thrust me from the room.

"I had drawn my revolver in that moment of passion, and as I was thrust into the hall I was caught about the neck by one of the two men who had followed me, the other attempting to rob me. I fired, and he fell dead. Theo I left the spot.

"That night I was arrested for willful murder. Tom Jones, the companion of the man I had killed, swore that he and his companion were attempting to put me out of the building at the instigation of the man Marston, for disorderly conduct. I was tried, found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced for life to this prison.

"Lying in my prison after sentence, the man Marston came to me. He taunted me and enraged me; told me he knew my secret of the mysterious marks on Portia's arm—of the fortune awaiting her. But he also told me he knew nothing of her whereabouts.

"He said he had hired Jones to swear to the falsehood; he had never seen Jones before the time of the shooting of Davis, his comrade. He would find Portia, he said, and complete his revenge.

"This man Jones is now an inmate of this prison. I have never spoken to him, never having had the opportunity. He can clear me—he alone—if what Marston said was true.

"Of Portia I never heard. For fifteen years, in misery and distress, I have spent a life of woe and sorrow behind these bars. To-night we are free.

"Listen to me, young man, and promise me that if I aid you to escape from here you will join me in finding my daughter; that you will aid me in revenging myself upon this man Marston, who has wrecked my life and perhaps the happiness of my daughter. Promise me, if I die in escaping, that you will prosecute the search for her, and if you find her will marry her and claim the fortune from the Brethren of the Blood. Promise me this, and I will send you from this prison a free man and a rich one."

The young man had been regarding the face of the prisoner curiously, piteously. Now a look of the most absolute surprise at the strangeness of the request filled his mind. Believing him insane he, however, humored his whim.

"I promise it," he said earnestly. "Swear it! Raise your right hand to heaven, and swear as you hope for forgiveness from your Maker for all your sins, by all your belief in that future life, to carry out my desires and wed my daughter—to punish the destroyer of my life."

There was a terrible earnestness in the man's manner—a pleading intensity in his excited gestures.

"I swear it!" came solemnly from the young man's lips, believing he was making the pledge to a madman.

The older convict unbuttoned his frock and then his coarse under-habit, revealing as he did so two strips of worn cloth and buckskin tied across his chest.

He unfastened this, unrolled it, and taking out a piece of paper worn and yellow, handed it to his companion.

The young man took it, and by the dim light penetrating through the bars of his cell from the lamp without, read as follows:

"Received from George Andre the sum of ten thousand dollars, special deposit, payable to bearer on demand.
"GOLDEN, DRETEL & Co., Bankers."

For the first time during his conversation with his fellow-prisoner did Vivian believe him sane.

The certificate was genuine. His former business experience inclined him to that belief, and he handed it back to the man.

The other waved it away from him with the words:

"No—keep it! For fifteen years I have carried that certificate, which was upon me before being arrested. Before I was brought here and after conviction, I managed to obtain this pad for my chest from the jail physician. When examined I had hidden it with the ring in the pad, which they allowed me to retain. If we escape, well and good. We will obtain the money and prosecute our search for my lost daughter. If I am captured use it as you will to accomplish the

ends you have sworn to attain. Hark! do you hear that?"

Both listened; a bell sounded. The guards were being relieved; the hour for escape had arrived.

There was a sound of arms ringing on the stone upon the roof, the noise of human voices, the tramp, tramp of the sentries upon their monotonous rounds, and then the colonel said:

"Crawl into my cell at once."

The young man did as requested.

The excitement of the moment lent a new vigor to his frame, a flush to his ordinarily pale face.

The colonel approached the window and opened it; took out the bars one by one. They had been sawed through a week before. He then lifted the coarse mattress of his cot and drew therefrom a rope.

"Now, listen to me," he whispered. "I will attach the rope to the iron ends of the bed and drop it to the ground beneath. It falls over the lower tier of cells and into the water of the ditch thirty feet below. You descend when I give the signal, quietly, quickly. I will follow at once. Then strike out independently of me for the river, cross, and gain the hills.

"Once there, if you do not find me, go at once to New York, secrete yourself, and draw the money. I will communicate with you through the *Herald*."

He spoke quietly, earnestly, as he fixed the rope and dropped it over the window and into the darkness beneath.

"Yonder," he said, pointing to the wall which ran out directly opposite the window, "the guard passes every three minutes. Now is your time. Go, and if I am killed or overtaken, remember your oath."

"I remember," slowly spoke the young man.

He crawled through the window and began to descend.

As he reached the tier of cells below he went very slowly, for he counted upon the convicts being asleep.

As the rope went directly over one of the windows, his face, being turned within, met the full glow of a light shining through the diamond-hole in the cell-door. To his horror he found himself face to face with a prisoner.

It was Tom Jones, the convict!

Afterward it seemed as a dream to him, those ensuing few seconds. Just then it was a terrible reality.

The convict was screaming and yelling for the guards.

"You, you, Arnold Dacre!" he yelled, in a voice in which passion, alarm, and vindictive triumph blended. "Ah! I've caught you, and you shan't go. It was you and your devilish employee who sent me here. It was you and Dayton, the fiend that sent me to scuttle the ship, then betrayed me. Ho, guards! an escape, an escape!"

There was a sound of heavy feet on the esplanade above and a glaring of lights.

He heard the sharp report of a gun, mingled with the cry of a disappointed man. Then, as he struck the ground a body shot downward near him and was lost in the darkness. It was the unfortunate Colonel Andre.

Then, with a prayer for help and deliverance, Cecil Vivian struck out boldly, climbing the walls by the means Colonel Andre had already prepared, and raced like a bound down to the Hudson, into whose cold waters he plunged, just beyond the railroad track.

His first step had been taken toward freedom.

Liberty!

As a bird, pinion-prised and free from an entanglement of fetters and cage, soars aloft, with exultant thrill and joyful cry, after a long confinement within unnatural bonds, so Cecil Vivian, with stroke after stroke, swam away from the hated prison.

He experienced a sense of delight, which his immediate peril and almost certainty of recapture failed to render less intense or triumphant.

To breathe the cool, fresh air without the presence of a guard, to breast the current, confident in a strength augmented by the nearness of future freedom, sent warm blood in a hot rush through every artery and vein of his frame, lending to it renewed youth and activity and powers of endurance.

He was a noble swimmer, and forgot all the brooding misery of the past, his mind filled only with a determined resolution to outdo his pursuers or die in the attempt.

In a straight line he would reach a point which shelved down to the bank leading

from a pretty summer villa which he had often watched from the high window of his lonely prison cell.

So accustomed had his eye been to seeing this spot and the landscape surrounding it that it had become a monotonous picture in his mind, and even in the white moonlight, dim and uncertain, he knew that he could trace his way to a place of security.

He laughed, the first utterance of the kind that had escaped his lips for months, as he thought of outwitting his pursuers.

The prison and shore were gradually fading away in the misty distance; their lights grew more and more dim; the shouts of the men getting out the boats became more remote, and he exultantly saw the spot between the high promontory and the regular elevation of rocks grow nearer and nearer.

In the midst of his apparent success at escape a sudden thrill of terror pervaded his frame.

He had smiled at the idea of the boats overtaking him on the Hudson, with his dexterous skill in evading them; he had scoffed at the thought of their bullets reaching him in the uncertain moonlight, but a new cause of fear had arisen. A gun-boom went over the waters, the signal to the guard on the shore.

Suddenly a light bright as day shone out upon the waters, dazzling the eyes of the swimmer—a reflected light on the shore.

It shone over the waters, and falling with cruel radiance on the swimmer revealed his form struggling in the water as plainly as daylight.

The bank was now only a few rods distant, but lights flashed hither and thither, and the presence of the guards gathering at the spot where he proposed landing was plainly apparent.

The realization of his position had weakened him.

To lose liberty when almost within his grasp was too terrible to think of.

Behind him the approaching boat of the prison-keepers; before him the shore-guard; to one side an only chance to escape, an uncertain risk, but surely worth the venture.

With a sudden dive he disappeared from view, swam rapidly under the water, and when he again arose puffing and panting to the surface he was outside the radius of the light.

For a little time he rested on the water and surveyed the scene behind him.

Plainly visible, the guard-boat shot over the spot where he had gone down.

There was no time to lose, no time to spend in so dangerous a locality, and with a second dive he gained a spot a rod further from the place, then swam rapidly toward the bank.

Reached at last! Tired, breathless, almost exhausted, he grasped a friendly rock and raised himself upward to a standing position without the water.

Step by step, hand over hand, he climbed the weary ascent, never pausing, never looking down, and at last with a sigh of relief he drew himself upward over the shelving top and stood safely upon the earth.

What was that?

A cold thrill pervaded his frame as a human form started forward upon him.

In the light of the moon he saw the glittering uniform of a guard.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET SYMBOLS.

With a sudden movement he sprang upon the man, caught him by the throat, forced him to the ground and smote his head against the rocks. Then he sprang up and flew from the spot with the bounding gait of a startled fawn.

A shot was fired after him, but missed.

He hurried on, tearing over the uneven surface, and finally came to an abrupt stop at a low wall surrounding the villa toward which he had first directed his way.

Its garden at that point, which he reached after he had leaped the stone wall, was overgrown with weeds and straggling vines, and as he heard the sounds of his pursuers, attracted thither by the report of fire-arms, he dashed recklessly, breathlessly onward. The villa itself was a two-story stone building, and as he came into the shadow of its left wing he found himself fairly cornered.

In the thoroughfare without lanterns flashed hither and thither.

In the rear the sounds of his pursuers evidenced the fact that they were close upon his trail.

Fairly cornered, yet two methods of escape seemed open to him—a bold dash

through the gards without, or concealment in the house before him.

He would undoubtedly have risked the first method in the excitement and impulse of the moment, had he not seen in the angle of the building a water-pipe running up to the roof.

In a moment his design was in process of execution.

With a quick movement he mounted the pipe, drew himself thence to a little trellis-work, and as he reached the roof crouched low behind a chimney, safe for the present, at least, from his pursuers.

He lay in the shadow of the chimney, silent, breathless, exhausted, his eyes fixed on the opposite wall.

He saw a form come to the open window and gaze out, the light within the room revealing a dark-skinned beauty, whose bright eyes flashed magnetically as she peered forth.

There were the sounds of whistles, signals, shouting and commotion.

The tumult faded at last, the lights receded from the building, and a feeling of relief was experienced by the escaped convict as he saw that the guards had been thrown on a false scent and had gone, as they supposed, in close pursuit of him.

Should he leave at once or remain quiet until the guards returned from their search for him?

In the impetuosity of his nature he resolved to place as much territory as was possible between himself and the prison.

He half arose, and then he paused.

The young woman in the room, the window of which was not ten feet from him, had moved the lamp so its rays shone directly on the wall opposite.

Should he attempt to descend she would be sure to discover him, and he resolved to wait until she had left the apartment or had retired to rest.

For the present, however, she had apparently no intention of doing either.

She took up a book, seated herself by the open window, turned over its pages idly, and then her meditative gaze fell musingly upon the gently moving leaves, the summer-night's stars, and the convict watched her impatiently.

She could not have been more than twenty years of age, but beautiful in form and feature.

She was, in short, a lady whom all men would admire, few love, and none confide in. What her capabilities were for loving or hating, the firm, gently compressed mouth told. What her powers of enchanting were the curl of the lips in smiling only too well indicated.

She could allure, repel, or hold at a distance, as she chose.

Suddenly she arose with a weary sigh, went to the marble-topped dressing-case and stood for a moment, intently regarding herself in the mirror.

The full beauty of her face flashed upon the vision of the escaped convict as she stood thus, and as her hands undid a splendid brooch of diamonds, he saw with satisfaction that his chance to retreat would soon be afforded.

She approached the window and raised her hand to pull down the shade. As she did so the loose, flowing sleeve of her dress fell back, revealing the well-rounded outlines of the fair arm.

A suppressed cry burst involuntarily from the lips of the escaped convict, for there, plainly revealed in the radiant lamplight, dark and distinct, upon the fair arm, immediately above the elbow, were three marks, which were burned into the memory of the young man from that eventful night's scenes, and which were now plainly revealed to his amazed gaze—the symbols of the society of the Brethren of the Blood.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE WHITE MOONLIGHT.

Was it imagination—was it reality?

Fate works curious coincidences and circumstantial combinations, and he had of a surety, that first night of his escape, come face to face, although unknowing and unknown, to the fair woman, whom the shade of the window now shut out from his sight, whom he had sworn to wed.

He descended the trellis and the water-pipe, and reached the ground full of strange thoughts.

If this woman lived here, and he must of necessity return so near the place of his former incarceration, what disguise would serve to hide him from the hounds whom

Gould Dayton would set upon his track to discover him?

Ah! a gleam of hope entered his mind as he thought of the money of his probably dead prison companion.

With that once in his possession, what thorough changes of face and apparel were not possible?

He glanced past the corner of the building, stood undecided for a moment, and then started away on a keen run.

Alperious move! Had he remained where he was for an hour more, had he taken another road, his discovery by two guards returning from the search would not have occurred.

Sudden as a flash of light, as he darted on a path near the main road, a commanding voice called out:

"Halt!"

He stood still, frozen, petrified with horror.

To be taken now, when life and liberty were so near, to go back to that awful servitude, was terrible to contemplate.

"Convict 93, lift up your hands."

The order came quickly, peremptorily, followed by the sharp click of a gun-lock.

Both guards had raised their pieces to a level with the head of the man ten feet before them.

He lifted his hands as they spoke, raised them above his head, and then sprang backward.

It was a feint but it served his purpose.

As he fell to the ground quickly two reports sounded on the still night air, and when the smoke cleared away the convict was gone.

Unheeding and reckless, he dashed forward.

If it meant death, it should be here, under the free vault of heaven, drinking in the pure, fresh air, and sacrificing himself to regain a position among men.

The moon swung high in the heavens, but its light was toned down, mellow and soft, and the thickly interspersed trees hid him well as he hastened on through the forest.

Death! Another halt! another surprise! Was the country at large scouring for him? He came almost face to face with a man whose gun and manner indicated that he was a hunter—a man-hunter.

He leaped over a bush, sprang into a side-path, and escaped this danger, too.

Hark! what was that? Pursuers! He knew it now; not one, not two, but half a dozen, and as he saw a light glimmering through the trees he resolved to gain some covert and hide, for he was incapable of longer standing the exhaustion of constant travel after the wearying events of that night.

At length he reached a little fence, leaped it, ran up a garden path, and crouched low on the vine-shaded piazza of a little cottage fronting the road.

Through the open window he saw a form—the form of a woman—quietly sewing. Her keen hearing was not at fault. The advent of the convict was noticed by her.

She arose and came to the large, open window, while he, pale, breathless and excited, faced her with a haunted look and an appealing eye.

"I am the escaped convict," he said. "If you have a father, a brother, a lover, save me for their sakes. Providence will reward you for your deed, for I am an innocent and a suffering man."

Did he notice the ghastly pallor of the woman's face, or was he too entirely engrossed in his own escape to heed her trembling form, her quivering voice, the hand reached out to catch the window-sill, as if to prevent her from falling?

Obedient more her mute, tacit consent than her words, "Come in," he sprang through the window and stood in the middle of the room, excited, anxious and undecided.

She opened a door leading to the little attic in the house and motioned him thither. He obeyed her without questioning, without hesitation, ascended the stairs, and in the darkness seated himself on the edge of a low cot, awaiting the arrival of his pursuers with beating heart.

Through the open window soon came the sounds of human feet and voices.

He listened anxiously.

"You live here, madam?"

In clear, quiet tones, so like, yet so unlike, a voice which had once been familiar to him, came the reply:

"I do, sir."

"Have you seen a man pass by here—a convict?"

"I have seen no one pass the house this evening."

The men hurried away, and the sound of their onward movements was wafted to him on the soft evening zephyr.

For the present, at least, he was saved.

He descended the stairs quietly and stood at the closed door, which the woman had unlocked as soon as the men had gone. It was slightly ajar and he gazed through.

There, with her eyes wildly distended, her hands crossed upon her beating heart, stood the woman. Heaven! what was this? In the pale, intellectual face, in the well-known form, there was a living resemblance to Ethel Wayne. He pushed open the door and stood before her.

The woman's manner changed as she looked.

The agonized face relapsed into a countenance of white pallor, the eyes became veiled beneath the long, dark lashes.

"Madam!" he said in broken tones, "who you are I know not. You resemble one I once knew, once loved. This I know, you have saved me. Can I be deceived? Are you not Ethel Wayne?"

The woman raised her eyes steadily to his face. It was evident that she was schooled to conceal her emotions, and she said, simply:

"I am Mrs. Dane, a widow."

"It is not Ethel," murmured Cecil. "The hair is different, the face is older. Forgive me, madam," he said. "A man just out of a den worse than the cage of a wild animal cannot be himself all at once. You have saved me to-night, and all I can do now is to thank you, but you will not be forgotten for your kindness."

He started impulsively forward and caught her hand in his own as he spoke and pressed a fervent, tearful kiss of gratitude upon it. She shuddered as she withdrew her hand, turned a shade paler, but otherwise maintained her composure.

She offered him something to eat, but he refused it with courteous thanks. He must be away, he said, and then as he disappeared through the window she sunk pale and motionless upon a sofa.

He pressed onward, encouraged by his recent adventure.

A train thundered by a few rods below him, and the thought of boarding some freight-car and placing more distance between himself and the prison authorities filled his mind.

There, half a mile distant, was the depot. A lonely road, lined with lime-kilns and old pits, led from the place.

He directed his footsteps thither.

The hour had become late, the lights in the village were dying out one by one, and all was quiet around him.

Rapidly he crept along toward the railroad track.

Suddenly he stumbled; the earth seemed to open beneath his feet; he struggled to catch at the edge of a pit into which he had fallen; he seemed to fall through immense space, and then he became partially unconscious.

What varied fancies floated through the dreamer's mind as he lay there at the bottom of the pit stunned and bruised, insensible to all action or thought save the rushing ideas which thronged his brain, ever active and fertile!

Faced wreathed in flowers, the wealth and refinement of palatial residences when he was a king among men, and the samelineaments of feature, inexpressibly sad and woe-begone, casting upon him a reproachful glance or a pitying smile.

The face of his dead fellow-prisoner, the face of Ethel Wayne, the features of the woman of the villa, the countenance of the woman at the cottage, and amid it all, intangible, perplexing, a return to life and consciousness.

Where was he? What had happened? Had he been only dreaming that dream of liberty so constantly in the restless sleeping of the captive? No; there was the pit, the moon and stars above, the trailing vines adown its sides.

He started as, reaching out his hand, it came in contact with some soft, cold object, and every fiber in his frame thrilled with that sudden and peculiar tingle which the presence of blood can cause.

His hand was wet with blood.

He realized that fact at once, and as his eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness of the place he shuddered as he saw lying face downward, at the bottom of the pit, a dead body.

That it had not been there long the fresh blood indicated, and as a new idea came

into the escaped convict's mind, he turned over the form and laid his hand upon the heart of the corpse.

Corpse it surely was, for no responding throb told of the presence of any lingering vitality. He was astonished to see a face so very like his own.

Who the man was he did not know, but he was dead, and that his face was badly bruised at once convinced the convict that he had been thrown into the pit or had accidentally fallen into it.

Hastily his resolve was taken. He determined to don the clothes of the man, to place his own in their stead, and to escape under the identity of the dead stranger.

To have the body of the latter found and buried as his own would forever destroy his risk of being sought for and discovered.

Life had no charms for him under his own name; no ties called him back to the old life; sundered and severed, they caused him to shrink from again communicating or associating with his old companions.

A little satchel, evidently dropped by the stranger, lay in the pit. Hastily he undressed himself and the form of the stranger.

He brushed the dust and blood from the clothes, and shuddered as he noticed one spot where some loose rock or other means had caused a hole. It was wet with blood. Then he dressed the corpse in his prison garments. He took up the satchel, and with some little difficulty gained the road above the pit.

He went on in the direction of New York, thoughtful, careless of meeting any one.

His head was bowed, his face sad and meditative. He had buried Cecil Vivian. The convict was dead. There need be no fears on that score.

What had life before him? If he had buried a man whose crime had been unintended sin, might he not be taking up the existence of one whose years had been spent in evil and crime, and upon whose future a mispent past might levy still further committal of error, perhaps crime? Still, he had assumed a part he must go on with, and when at length he reached the lonely depot and stood awaiting the train to New York under the lamplight, he started as he read his new name, neatly written on a package of letters he had found in the inner pocket of his coat.

They were addressed to—

"ARNOLD DACRE,
"London,
"England."

CHAPTER IX.

A TRUMP CARD.

During the time so uneventful and monotonous to the young prisoner, wasting away, body and mind, in the lonely prison, how fared it with his cousin, Gould Dayton?

Vice sometimes awards a recompense for the committal of a crime, but exacts a terrible payment in the end for all.

Lured into a sense of false security by his confidence in his own power to continue his deception upon the public, and to keep at bay all who might try to unravel his plot and exhibit the true inwardness of his vile nature, the secretary at once set to work to strengthen himself, financially and socially, in his new position, and now that the field was deserted by his rival, he would gain the hand of Ethel Wayne by fair means or false.

The company was a wreck, its stockholders said, and Gould Dayton did not gainsay them.

One week after the news of the loss at sea of the steamer containing the fuisse consignment of gold, a privately chartered vessel brought a mysterious package to the harbor of New York City.

It was the gold which Dacre and Jones had substituted the iron ore for, and in less than a week Gould Dayton had purchased every share of stock on the market at ten cents on the dollar.

Within six months after the conviction of Cecil Vivian as a defaulter and forger, the Golconda Gold-Mining Company, organized on a basis of individual ownership, had not only regained its former position of financial strength and reliability, but was paying dividends amounting to nearly one hundred per cent. per annum.

The former secretary of the company became a man of influence and wealth, and its former president was sorely remembered.

Safe in his financial security, he never imagined that fate was slowly but surely working out for him his destiny, and that his crime, yet self-concealed, would be sure to bring its full punishment.

The man of many plots and schemes was busily engaged in other projects, having for their end his own individual emolument and the aggrandizement of the woman he loved, Ethel Wayne.

One December evening we find him, habited in comfortable dressing-gown and slippers, seated at his desk in his splendidly furnished library; the warm fire in the grate and the creature comforts on a sideboard bidding defiance to the cold blasts of winter without.

He was now at the high tide of his success, and a satisfied gleam was visible in the sinister eyes and evil face.

He had reorganized the Golconda on a scale grander and more lucrative than ever before; he had won the friendship and confidence of Ethel Wayne; he had placed her father under many obligations to himself. Cecil Vivian was languishing in prison, and the only witness of the interview he had had with his cousin which caused his downfall was a wanderer in Europe.

There seemed no ship betwixt the cup and the lip in his case; he had wealth, and possessed a sure prospect of winning the hand of Ethel Wayne. What more could a man desire?

In spite of all this, he was at times strangely ill at ease.

Often in the night he would awaken and feel that he was standing beside a bottomless, bridgeless gulf, behind which spread the plain of his black and desolate past.

Upon this particular evening he had drank merrily to his own good fortune, given the servants an evening out, and seated himself, with some papers, at his desk.

He worked on in the silence of the place, broken only by the ticking of the ornate clock on the marble mantel-piece over the fire-place uninterrupted, for nearly an hour. Suddenly he started.

The inside blinds of the library were open at the top, and a low porch, only a few feet from the ground, ran, with an iron railing, around the windows.

Was it reality, or a dim fancy, conjured up by some unexplainable mental phenomena—that face at the window—those burning eyes, that expression!

He sprang to his feet with a startled cry.

A second look showed no face at the window, no form on the veranda; then he poohed at his own thoughts, and was turning his anxious, half-satisfied face from the window, when, on the outer sill, he saw a letter.

There was no mistaking it.

Upon the broad sill, held down by a stone to keep it from blowing away, was a letter.

He opened the window and took it up with a nervous trepidation, which sent every vestige of color from his features; then he slammed the window down, closed the blinds tightly, locked the catches, and drew the shades.

He threw himself into a chair, examined the superscription of the wet letter scrawled upon the envelope directed to himself, and opening it, read:

"MYSTER DAYTON:

"Yer knows who I be, an' I know yer five thousand dollars worth. I know yer had a hand in that stock business—penitentiary five years. I tracked yer the night yer burned the letters in the letter-box—penitentiary ten years. That offsets yer prisoner Cecil Vivian who I dont know and never saw but intend ter. Now then me covey about that Colonel Andre buznis—perjury ten years. Do yer understand me? Im on yer track. Miss Ethel Wayne is the girl yer arter. Ile give you and Dacre away to her so help me heaven and thats the card I trump yer best play with.

"A VENGEUR."

It was coarse, it was badly spelled and worse written, this illiterate scrawl of a man whose social and financial status were so far below the secretary that he held him and his class in contempt, yet he trembled and paled at the letter, and sat in a fit of abstraction, deep and irritating, for over an hour.

Finally he rose with a curious smile on his dark face. He took up the poker from the fire-place and went to the window, rolling up the shades and coolly proceeding to force off the catches on the blinds by prying the shutters toward him.

This accomplished he broke the lower window with one stroke of the iron and returned to his desk, scattering the papers in disorder, and then hastening from the apartment.

It was half an hour later when he returned, and when he did so he was accompanied

by a little, sharp-looking man, whose professional air and general watchful expression, from the closely buttoned coat to the short-cut side beard, indicated the detective.

"The robbery was committed this evening," Dayton was saying. "I had left the library and gone to see a friend a few doors distant. When I returned I found a man trying to pry open a drawer in the secretary."

"Could you describe him?" inquired the detective.

"Perfectly;" and the secretary proceeded to describe the man known as Tom Jones.

"I've settled him this time," muttered Dayton, as he sought rest that night. "Within a few days he'll be in a close prison and incapable of doing me further harm; and now to move assiduously lay siege to the heart of the fair Ethel."

Politically and cool-headed, he sought every advantage he could to impress the young girl in his favor, and one day he approached Mr. Wayne on the subject.

"I love your daughter, Mr. Wayne," he said, humbly, "and I have loved her since I first knew her. Once she rejected my love, and I have never approached her upon the subject since. I would not for a moment present my claims to cause her grief or distress her; but I love her, Mr. Wayne, and if you consent—"

"Consent, my dear Dayton? It is the dearest wish of my heart. There is no man who I could so desire for an alliance with my daughter as yourself. Our relative positions toward one another tend to render your marriage with Ethel a consummation most devoutly to be wished for. I give you my entire consent and pledge you my endeavors in your behalf."

Dayton thanked the banker. He had anticipated no opposition, but he had not counted on so active an ally at so early a stage of the proceedings.

He was not long in seeking out Ethel.

"In offering you my love and asking you to become my wife," he said, respectfully, candidly, "in proposing for your hand, I am free to confess that I do not expect you to regard me with the affection that I have always entertained for you. I know you loved my unfortunate cousin, and I am also aware of the fact that his memory is not yet obliterated from your mind. I ask you to become my wife and cheer my lonely home with your presence, hoping, in time, by my devotion to you, to win some cherishing regard from you in return."

She was pale and silent.

It was a strange wooing; cunning, influence and determination on the one side, indifference and a broken heart on the other.

To her Cecil Vivian was as dead as if buried fathoms under the earth. She had no one left upon earth to love but her adopted father, and his entreaties and requests prevailed.

So they were engaged.

The wedding-time had been appointed, and the day, so auspicious to Gould Dayton, dawned gloriously.

There was a large gathering of people at the Wayne mansion and the wedding services were gone through with *colat*.

They proposed making a visit to a relative of Mr. Wayne's, in the Southern states, and the happy bridegroom was seated in the library conversing with Mr. Wayne after the ceremony and Ethel had gone to her room.

In the hurry and bustle of the occasion Gould Dayton had scarcely time to speak a word to his newly made bride, nor had he noticed that a note had been sent to Mrs. Dayton and that a somewhat roughly attired man had been shown by her maid to her boudoir; but he was startled from his apathy as, looking up from his seat, he saw the library door open and a servant usher in the detective he had hired to apprehend Tom Jones, whom he had accused of robbery.

"One word, Mr. Dayton," said the detective in a flushed, excited manner.

The secretary took him to a window, followed by the wondering glances of Mr. Wayne.

"I've tracked him," said the man hurriedly.

"Well, was it necessary to follow me here on my wedding-day to tell me this?" demanded Dayton, somewhat irritated at being reminded of his disagreeable enemy at this moment.

"Yes," tersely replied the detective.

"Why so?"

"Because he is in this house."
 "In this house?" ejaculated the secretary in surprise.
 "Yes. This morning I tracked him, followed him—"
 "Well?"
 "To this house."
 "Where?"
 "In my lady's room, taken there half an hour since by a servant."
 A cry of startled horror and rage broke from the lips of the bridegroom.
 "Why did you not tell me this before?" he demanded, growing white and pallid.
 "Because the servants insisted on it that you were engaged."
 At that moment a second man, a stranger, opened the door and beckoned to the detective.

Gould Dayton followed him out.
 There, coming down the carpeted stairs, with a look of assurance and malignant triumph on his face, was Tom Jones.
 The officer laid his hand on the man's arm.

"You are my prisoner," he said simply.
 "I am, eh?" laughed the man with a look of intense disagreeableness at Gould Dayton, who, silent and pale, watched the apprehension of the ex-miner. "What for?"
 "For robbery. Come, no noise in a gentleman's house."

"Gentleman, eh?" sneered the miner as he fixed his eyes on the pallid bridegroom. "It's all right, my covey. 'You've brought up a case ag'in me, but you've nabbed me too late. Go to your wife, Mr. Gentleman, sneak and villain, and see how she receives ye. I told ye I'd be even with ye, and I am. Trump one, my covey. I've taken the trick and now you can take me."

The detective led him on as he finished speaking, leaving Dayton transfixed with fear, baffled rage and hatred.

"What does this mean, Dayton?" inquired Mr. Wayne, in perplexed amazement.

Dayton led the way from the staring circle of servants into the library, and sank into a seat with a forced laugh.

"This upstart has chosen a bad time to be arrested," he said, with a forced composure in his manner, not a little anxious over the serious manner of his companion. "Only a man who committed a burglary, and has sought to boast of his cunning in eluding the vigilance of the officers by coming here on my wedding-day. Had we not better inform Ethel that it is near train-time?" he added, nonchalantly consulting his watch.

"Yes," and Mr. Wayne rang for a servant, not at all satisfied with his son-in-law's explanation, but willing to let it pass for the time being.

"Inform Mrs. Dayton that we are waiting for her," said Mr. Wayne to the servant who answered the summons of the bell.

The servant bowed and retired.
 He returned in a few minutes with a wondering face.

"Well?" queried Dayton, who mysteriously divined some cause for concern in the startled manner of the servant.

"Her door is locked, sir, and she made no reply to my knock."

"She'll be down soon, Gould," said Mr. Wayne.

She did not come, however, and half an hour passed before her father began to get uneasy at her continued absence.

Accompanied by his son-in-law, he ascended the stairs to his daughter's apartment.

He knocked at the door, but no one replied.

Startled out of his wonted composure, he looked up at the white face of Dayton.

"What can it mean?" he asked in a surprised tone of voice.

"Some mystery, depend on it. Force the door," suggested Dayton.

They did so. There was no occupant to the room, and it was in wild confusion.

The bridal veil was lying carelessly on the bed with the bridal dress, torn and disordered.

On the dressing-case, the ink scarcely dry, was a note.

It bore no address, but the cowardly heart of the secretary froze with fear and terror as he heard the words it contained:

"No words can express the loathing, the contempt, the horror, I feel for the man who could deceive a broken-hearted woman and wreck the life of an innocent man. No language can tell the pity I feel for a father who, a party to the same fraud, could allow his daughter to wed the man with whom he has shared the ill-gotten wealth stolen from Cecil Vivian. I leave both forever. I go to prove the innocence of my poor, misguided

darling, and I shall succeed; and then, let the blow strike where it will, I shall vindicate him before the whole world."

CHAPTER X. THE VALET.

The third evening after the escape of Cecil Vivian from the prison, a young man, dressed in the height of fashion, and surrounded by all the accessories of comfort and luxury, sat at a table in an elegant apartment in one of the most fashionable hotels of New York.

Attired in faultless broadcloth and immaculate linen, few would have recognized in "Arnold Daore, just returned from Europe," the escaped prison convict, Cecil Vivian; yet it was he.

"Where I lay my life down," he had said to himself, "I take this man's up. From all I can ascertain from his baggage and letters, his name is Arnold Daore, a young man about my own age, having but little money and no relatives in this country. He seems to have led an idle, desultory sort of life, having been in California, Europe, and parts of Asia. He has evidently gambled deeply, drank some, and been engaged in several rather disreputable affairs. If his life has been bad, my future shall be one of morality and honesty. It is my only protection, and when I have carried out poor Colonel Andre's last requests, leave this country and pass a quiet life in some foreign land."

If the thoughts of the young man ever returned to Ethel Wayne with a desire to see her, he subdued any such desire at once. Her words had wrought a gulf too wide to be ever bridged. He could think of her as a lost love; as a regained one, never.

There were two letters on the table before him, and to these he directed his attention at once.

The one, in a neat, feminine handwriting, read:

"GRATIOT, July, 18—.

"DEAR ARNOLD:—Although, according to your letter, I expected you on the 4th, you did not come. Perhaps this was as well, for our friend D. was here, and I should not care for you to have met him so soon after your return from Europe. With him, as you know, fate has dealt adversely, and the loss of his young wife has made him more irritable than ever. I told him of your return, and he left to meet you in hot anger, vowing he would make you return without seeing me. Did he do so? and is this the reason of my not having seen you? You cannot imagine how I think of you, how anxious I am to see you. When my galling servitude to that man has ceased, will the same doubt ever exist between us, or will time prove my fidelity and candor of purpose? Write to me soon, for I shall be very anxious to hear from you."

"MABEL."

The young man studied long and earnestly over this letter, nor could he, even with the assistance of other letters which he found in the portmanteau of the dead man, and which had been written to him by this same Mabel while he was in Europe, elucidate clearly the hidden meaning of some portions of the letter of the young lady.

The other letter was in a crabbed, business-like hand, and was as follows:

"HOTEL, NEW YORK CITY.

"To ARNOLD DACRE, Esq.:
 "Respected Sir:—My time of visit to my friends having ceased, I beg leave to announce my return to-morrow by the evening train.
 Your obedient servant,
 "JEAN DARSCHELS."

It was this latter epistle which puzzled and worried Cecil. He could, for a time at least, keep out of the way of Mabel, but who was this Jean Darschels?

From the tenor of the letter, evidently not a friend; judging from its conciseness and business-like dictation, not a menial. But one reference in all the letters of Miss Mabel made to Arnold Daore while in London afforded any clew to the identity of Jean Darschels, and that a brief one.

"Who is Jean?" she wrote, "and has he taught you French? If so, we can converse in that language and mystify our mutual friend D."

Again "D," and "who is Jean?" Ah, that was a question which harassed him considerably, and which he knew was soon to be answered. Would that elucidation involve detection?

He perused the letters once more, put them

away, and then set to work at imitating the handwriting of Daore from his journal in his portmanteau.

This journal was for the most part simply a record of incidents of travel, with a few individualities or references to friends.

Finally he completed a letter, a fair sample of the other's handwriting.

In falling into the pit, or while escaping from the prison, Cecil had torn the finger of his right hand on a jagged rock, and he had bound it up in a bandage. He therefore had no excuse for his rather irregular chirography.

The letter was as follows, a copy after the fervent style of several blotted letters found in Daore's portfolio:

"DEAREST MABEL:—I could not come as agreed; business detained me. Write at once. When shall I come? and appoint a time when D. is not there."

"Yours affectionately."

He dared not trust himself further, and sealed the letter and directed it.

Again he was in a quandary.

He did not know her address, except Gratiot. He ventured on that—"Miss Mabel Clare, Gratiot, New York."

He laid it on the table, closed the portfolio, and taking some paper, continued his effort at copying the real Arnold Daore's writing, but soon arose to his feet with a weary yawp just as a knock sounded on the door.

There, bowing and smiling, stood a neat, dapper little man, faultlessly attired. He had little, bright eyes, sharp and piercing, a straggling gray mustache, and was rather small in stature.

"Ah, pardonez moi, monsieur, I—"

He started with a look which set his eyes dilating, his mouth open agast—startled, dumfounded. The impostor trembled for his identity.

"You seem surprised," he said, coolly.

"What is it, Jean?"

"Ah, monsieur, such a change!" resumed the other, with well-bred politeness, affecting far more emotion than he really felt.

"Has monsieur been unwell?"

"Slightly. Why did you not come before?"

Jean Darschels stared. Cecil discovered his error; this was the man. Now for his relation to him.

"So you have returned?" continued Cecil in a careless tone of voice.

"Yes," said the other, with sprightly vivacity, removing his gloves and hat and moving briskly with them and his cane to the dressing-room; "and now, monsieur, having seen my friends and had a vacation, I am ready once more for service. Any new commands, monsieur?"

"None."

Jean shrugged his shoulders with a comical expression.

"Then monsieur is perhaps short?"

"No, Jean, on the contrary, very long. I have made a raise."

The Frenchman laughed gleefully.

"Monsieur is a chevalier of fortune, a child of the world, but always a gentleman," said Jean, vivaciously.

"His valet, evidently," murmured Cecil to himself.

He was right. Jean had been a confidential servant to the dead Arnold Daore.

"I am going out for a short time, Jean," said Cecil. "In the meantime, look over my clothes and arrange my portmanteau for a journey."

"For a journey?"

"Yes."

"To Europe again?"

"No; on a tour of pleasure to the South."

He left the room as he spoke. The ever-vigilant valet called to him, his quick eye observing the letter on the table directed to Miss Clare.

"Pardonez moi," he said, taking up the letter. "The letter to madame is not directed as usual."

"As usual—you mean—" said Cecil with a puzzled air.

"To the villa; to Gervaise Villa, at Gratiot."

In those few past days of surprise none had struck Cecil so forcibly as the coincidental fact revealed in the valet's last words.

Could Mabel Clare be the same woman whom he had seen at the villa at Gratiot while hiding from his pursuers behind the chimney? Surely his new role was to be a difficult one and full of surprises.

"I omitted it accidentally," he said carelessly. "See that it is mailed," and he left the apartment.

He passed down the corridors of the hotel and out into the street with a rare, exultant feeling. Liberty unrestrained, unquestioned was his.

He might face down his best friend. He could prove himself to be Arnold Dacre, and he passed on to the banking-house without evincing the least timidity.

A sadness passed over his mind as he recognized many old friends passing him. None knew him.

He presented the order given him by Colonel Andre at the cashier's desk for payment. A look of surprise stole over that officer's face as he perused the paper, and he lifted his eyes inquiringly to the face of the young man. He read nothing but well-bred composure there, however, and taking the paper went to the president of the bank.

"You will please step into the president's room," he said as he returned.

Cecil did as requested. There he found a portly, consequential personage seated at a desk holding the paper in question between his fingers.

"The certificate is all right," he said, promptly. "How came you by it?"

"Honestly," respectfully answered Cecil, much annoyed by the president's manner.

"I presume so; still, we are curious about the history of the piece of paper. It is many years since it was issued, and we had considered the holder of the document dead and the paper lost. It is payable to bearer, and we certainly shall not refuse its payment; but we have a natural curiosity in ascertaining its history."

"The paper was presented to me to cash and use the money for a special purpose," replied Cecil. "For many years Colonel Andre has been the inmate of a prison, the victim of a horrible plot against his life and liberty. To relieve his name from the odium of shame and wrong now attached to it through the commission of an alleged crime I am sworn to dedicate this money."

The money was paid and the young man left the bank with ten thousand dollars in his pocket-book.

As he did so he failed to notice a man hasten into a dark hall-way and evade meeting him as he passed by. It was Jean Darschels, his valet.

That evening, in the comfortable apartments at the hotel, Cecil Vivian read in the evening paper the following:

"A SAD CASE.—Two prisoners attempted an escape from the prison on the 8th inst. The one, Colonel Andre, who committed murder several years since, and for which the assassin was serving a life sentence, was shot while descending a rope to the ditch below his cell-window. The other, Cecil Vivian, a young man of more than ordinary business and social attainments, joined the river and succeeded in evading the officers until the next morning. His dead body was found in a pit near the prison. It is thought that he was shot by the guard and managed to drag himself to the pit. This young man was at one time the president of the Golconda Gold-Mining Company, of Alameda, California, and possessed a large fortune. He was serving a fifteen-years' sentence on the combined charges of swindling and forging the name of the secretary of the company."

That evening Jean Darschels, the valet, when his master had retired to rest, took out his note-book and made the following entries, additional to many like preceding ones:

"July 8—Followed A. D. on train to Gratiot; went toward villa over railroad at 8:15; met a man at the point where railroad diverges; would recognize him positively as D.; lost him in the darkness."

"July 9—Left for New York on A. M. train."

"July 10—Arrived in Boston; saw friends; mailed letters announcing return."

"July 11—Returned. There is some mysterious change in monsieur; what is it? Surely not done as a disguise. Looks as if just recovering from a long and severe siege of illness. He went to bank; followed him; saw private mem. in cypher; examined his valise and clothing; found a frock-coat covered with blood. What is the mystery?"

CHAPTER XI.

"NUMBER NINETY-THREE."

"You, eh?"

"Yes, me; why not? Ain't I as fit for a special detail as ye? Haan't my conduct bin exemplary sence I come here? Mighty lee-

He show of a feller glittin' away with a twenty-pound ball and chain to his foot, no knowledge of swimmin', a prison suit of clothes on, and a dozen guards within shoot-in' distance. So this is the grave-yard of the prison, is it? And them leetle boards show whar they've planted 'em jist like garden seeds. If these seed 'd grow they'd tell a sweet story agin' the devils as runs this ere institution."

The scene was the northern end of the prison-yard. The time toward evening of the day succeeding the escape of the convicts.

That day the supposed body of Cecil Vivian had been found, and Tom Jones and a fellow-prisoner had been detailed to bury the body.

"Quit your grumblin', 49," said the other man.

"Hush, and let's go to work. Come, it's no job diggin' the hole, an' when yer done let me know. I'm in for a snooze."

Jones dug the hole, turned to awaken his companion, and then, some sudden impulse moving him to the contrary, stood silently looking at the coffin.

"Ef ever there was a man that played a mean trick on a pal, it was Arnold Dacre, the man as lies in that ere box," muttered the man in a hoarse, meditative whisper. "T'other one's bad enough, but this one sold me bad and deserted me, arter professin' friendship and sich like. Ef I'm a ruffian and a villain, I'll show t'other one yet what an injured man can do when he's riled. I'll hev a look at this one, anyway."

He pried the loosely nailed cover from the coffin as he spoke.

He started as he gazed at the white, blood-stained face which lay in the rude box before him, and the expression of his face, so filled with a gleam of malignant hatred and satisfied spite, changed to one of startled surprise and perplexity.

Heaven! what a change had those few short hours of liberty wrought in this man. The short hair, the contour of feature and form were the same, but a nameless, indefinable difference existed and manifested itself despite the seal of death on that white face and those bloodless lips; and as the convict gazed it seemed as if some change had taken place in the dead man, too mysterious for his low grade of intellectuality to comprehend, which had changed his former hatred to a haunting dread and pity.

He examined the prison suit, the pockets, and the clothing of the dead man.

He found nothing much to reward his search, however; nothing but a picture. It was part of a photograph, separated from the card-board, and contraband in the institution, positively nothing being allowed to be retained by the prisoner upon entering the walls of the prison.

Cecil Vivian had secreted it in its present shape while undergoing examination; had dropped it to the floor and regained it adroitly when his clothing underwent examination.

The convict recognized the picture at once; it was Ethel Wayne's face, and he placed it in his pocket and turned to replace the cover on the coffin.

He started as he lifted the cover and set it down again.

His quick eye caught sight of something under the prison jacket of the dead man, which he had opened in rifling the pockets. It was an undershirt, and a thrill of curiosity and perplexity went through his frame as he lit upon the discovery.

No prison convict ever wore such clothes; no such comforts were allowed at the prison; for the texture of the garment was fine and it was white and clean.

In examining it he felt something under it like a thickness of cloth. He unbuttoned the undershirt and tore from the breast of the dead man a package, which was closely enveloped in silk, and which he succeeded in secreting about his person just as his companion awoke.

"Come, there's no time for foolin'," the man said; "cover him up."

They did so, and then placing the rude board bearing the inscription

.....
No. 93
.....

over it and shouldering their spades, left the place and returned to the prison.

That night, in the solitude of his cell, the convict, Tom Jones, by the light penetrating through the diamond hole in his cell-

door, cautiously drew the mysterious packet from his person, where he had concealed it, and examined its contents curiously.

He could with difficulty read the contents of the package. In fact, he carelessly glanced over them without ascertaining their import.

There was a long, closely written manuscript of about ten pages, a dozen small papers and a photograph, a picture of a woman entirely different in features than Ethel Wayne, yet radiantly beautiful, and under it was written, in a small, feminine hand, Mabel Clare.

The convict reclosed the package and secured it about his person.

The more he thought of it the more he was convinced of the fact that there was some mystery in the death of No. 93.

The convict thought that Arnold Dacre could not know Ethel Wayne, and he also was aware of the fact that when he had that interview with her which caused her flight from her father's house that he had told her of what he suspected of Dacre and knew of Dayton's plots.

The result of this reasoning, combined with the strange difference in general appearance with the A. D. whom he had seen day after day in the prison, led him to one definite conclusion: there had been mystery, deception, collusion on the part of the prison authorities, and the dead man was not Arnold Dacre.

If it was so Dacre was still at large, and he had been cheated of his revenge. Then his restless nature broke forth.

Day after day he concocted scheme after scheme for escape, only to discard and take up new ones.

At last, one night, about three weeks after Cecil Vivian's escape, cell 49 was found empty. The bird had flown and the cut lock showed the method of escape.

One week later a man attired in the habit of a well-to-do shopkeeper entered the hotel in New York where Cecil Vivian had put up when he assumed the identity of Arnold Dacre.

It was Tom Jones in disguise upon the trail of the man he had sworn to hunt down and revenge himself upon—Tom Jones with two mysterious packets in his possession and two photographs the originals of which he resolved to see.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER TWO YEARS.

Cecil Vivian did not long delay in New York City after drawing the money from the bank.

He had now two objects in life—to seek out the daughter of Colonel Andre and to retain his present identity successfully.

Deeming correctly that a week's usage to the society of his valet, Jean Darschels, would habituate him to the character he had assumed and tend to post him more fully in such a position, he made a flying trip South and returned to his hotel in New York to find a letter awaiting him from Miss Clare.

It bore date of several days previous and read:

"DEAR ARNOLD:—As you know I am staying with my friends, the Postlewaites, and conclude my visit in a few weeks. The air here is delightful, the scenery fine, the villa in splendid condition. You will be heartily welcome, and no danger of meeting D. Come as soon as you can, and make up your mind to stay for a week at least."

"MABEL."

So with his valet Cecil Vivian started for Gratiot.

He thought once of entirely abandoning Miss Wayne, of sinking Arnold Dacre as he had Cecil Vivian, of discharging his keenvitted servant and feigning a trip to Europe.

If Mabel Clare and this woman whom he had watched from his place of concealment that eventful night of the prison flight were one, then he must tell her all; must wed her. Ah! but to reveal his identity to this woman, to tell her who he was at the start, would so prejudice her against him as to cause her to repel him at once.

No; if she loved Arnold Dacre she might still unconsciously love on, never suspecting the substitution of himself for that other, and then he could tell her all after marriage.

Was she true, was she false, then whence this dread of D., the mysterious influence used in all her letters—what the secret of his influence over her?"

He had accepted the task, he would carry it to completion. By his sworn promise to the dread Colonel Audre he was pledged to the performance of a sacred duty.

Should he falter? Never! Life held but a memory, nothing of such hope as he might have experienced. He might learn to love this woman.

The bitterness of life might pass away. He might still love and— Oh, never, never! The tortured soul was filled with a memory of its sorrow and woe.

Then the events of that night of the escape recurred forcibly to his mind. The flight, the pursuit, the appeal to a woman so like the woman he had loved.

Out of the warm gratitude which went forth from his heart to this living image of Ethel Wayne grew a feverish desire to see her again, and why not?

He was going to Gratiot, the place where she lived. Why, he reasoned, should he not see her again? Meditating thus, he was rudely awakened by the stopping of the train.

"Gratiot!" called the conductor.

He arose and left the car. It was early afternoon, and he had not advised Miss Clare of the honor of his intended visit.

A vehicle was engaged, and his valet attending to his baggage, they soon set out for the villa.

A cold shudder swept through him as his eye wandered over the landscape; the dreary road, the far-gleaming villa nestling at the foot of the high cliffs, the far-off ocean; step by step he traced his wonderful escape of that night.

The prison stood outlined against the eastern sky, the very pit where he had fallen was passed, then the lonely cottage, where a woman's kindness and tact had saved him, and when at last the carriage stopped at the steps before the Gervaise Villa he started from his reverie as from a dream, and entered the wide hall through the open door.

It meant boldness and assumed composure now.

He walked steadily into the drawing-room.

A figure he had seen before started from the piano-stool, a face dark and handsome smiled with eager gladness upon him.

"Arnold!"

"Mabel!"

He clasped the hand which the woman offered him and a mist momentarily floated before his eyes as he recognized in the woman before him the same one whom he had seen upon that fateful night, the night of his escape from the prison. Mabel Clare and Portia Andre were one!

There was a constraint in his manner as he allowed the bewitching beauty to lead him to a sofa.

From the first the woman took the initiative, leading him on, drawing him out much as an adroit coquette might a bashful or reticent lover.

She talked gayly, variedly, now of his journey abroad, again of his letters, and told him how he had changed, bantering him with railery over his reserved manner.

He breathed more freely as the conversation fell into less familiar channels, and he conversed with more ease upon less dangerous topics than himself.

He was still treading on ground he but imperfectly understood. One misstep might reveal all, or at least awaken the suspicions of the keen-witted woman beside him.

He talked of his wanderings, describing places he had himself seen abroad, and an hour went swiftly by ere she permitted him to repair to his room to dress for a drive.

He found Mr. and Mrs. Postlewaite easy-going old people, who had never seen Dacre before, and therefore he felt at ease in their presence.

Could he carry out the deception?

From all the small-talk and generalities indulged in in his interview with Miss Clare, not one allusion had been made which decided him on two points which must inevitably come up: his true relation toward her and her mysterious connection with D.

He neither understood the one nor had he heard her mention the name of the latter, and as he sat by his chamber-window that night, dreamily watching the far-off prison lights and meditating deeply, he felt a strange lack of confidence in his ability to carry to a successful culmination the part he had assumed.

Then, too, he cogitated over the probabilities of the effect of his meeting the woman who had shielded him.

Would she not recognize him, and would not such recognition cause him confusion,

and perhaps eventually expose his deception?

Was it fate which seemed to keep within the little limit of Gratiot and its immediate vicinity all the accessories to this drama he was enacting? And might not the tragic ending be a return to those gloomy prison walls which lay directly within range of his vision?

Ah! what was that?

Through the open window, flung by some unseen hand, came a letter. To it was attached a stone.

He hurried to the window in time to see a form stealthily retiring through the underbrush.

His first impulse was to hasten after the man, but the height of the window and his ignorance of the place caused him to abandon this intention.

He drew the shades at the window and took up this mysterious missive.

So soon, alas!

It was not enough that he must know the friends of the dead Arnold Dacre; he must also know his enemies.

He had assumed the man's life; he must carry out the identity he had voluntarily taken up for better or worse.

The letter was an almost illegible scrawl, and it was with difficulty that he made it out.

Finally he became more familiar with the illy formed letters, and he read:

"ARNOLD DACRE.—I don't go fer to hev my revenge on a traytor without warnin'. Take warnin'. I've traced ye from the prison to New York, and then to Gratiot. I don't know why you was bagged, and I don't care, but I'll hev my revenge, an' I'll track ye and that devil Dayton ye betrayed n.e to, to the grave. When ye played the Europe game in New York I knew ye hed lied, but I sed nuthin'. Don't intend deliverin' ye up to the jailers. Not much. I've suthin' better nor that in store fer ye. Yer fine lady ain't the only one as would like ter know yer jail history. There's another as will foller ye, an' I warn ye afore I strike."

"T. J."

What could it mean?

If the mixed condition of affairs had heretofore puzzled him, this letter fairly perplexed him and baffled his most arduous endeavors to discern its significance.

Here was a man undoubtedly an enemy of Dacre, who had known him before and as a former inmate of the prison.

He retired to rest, harassed, troubled, wearied. His ignorance of some of the most important points in the history of Arnold Dacre was beginning to become more perplexing.

He awoke the following morning irritated and down-spirited. In vain Jean Darschels rallied him on his lady-love and endeavored by his wit to elevate his drooping spirits. The day passed wearily enough, even in the company of the vivacious Miss Clare.

They sat that evening in the drawing-room at a game of whist—Miss Clare full of life, her companion silent and moody.

He excused himself early in the evening, company arriving in the villa, and walked out into the grounds about the place, seeking in his own reflections to regain the peace of mind the anonymous letter had so disturbed.

He stood under the lamp at the carriage-gate and watched a solitary individual come slowly down the road from the path leading to the Gratiot depot.

The full flare of the gate-lamps shone brightly upon the faces of both men as Cecil Vivian turned to re-enter the house and the other took the same path.

Then there was a low cry of fear and amazement, which issued from the lips of the new-comer; for in under the gate-lamp of Gervaise Villa there stood, face to face, Gould Dayton and Cecil Vivian, met once more after two years.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN MYSTERY.

Of that interview between the miner, Tom Jones, and Ethel Dayton Gould Dayton never knew the full import. Suffice it to say that the man had gained entrance to the presence of Mrs. Dayton just after the wedding, and had told her of the full perfidy of her husband.

In her eyes the suspicion that her adopted father had had a part in the subsequent affairs of the company, and consequently had been a party to the entire plot, was believed by her.

He was equally guilty in her mind with her husband. He had lent his influence toward concealing the innocence of Cecil Vivian, of which he must surely have been aware.

As to Gould Dayton, the plain, straightforward story of the miner convinced her at once of the depth of his villainy.

Quick to act, horrified at the disclosures of her visitor, she wrote the note which was read by her husband and father with such varied emotions, and then stole from the house.

She had taken with her quite a sum of money, her own, and had gone at once to the village of Gratiot.

She had rented a house in the outskirts of Gratiot under the assumed name of Eunice Lane and had been there months when Cecil Vivian had escaped.

During that time slowly, very slowly, had she worked toward her object.

She had advertised for Tom Jones in a variety of ways and had endeavored to find some trace of the man whose name the examiner had imparted to her as being Arnold Dacre.

He had affirmed that Dacre and Dayton were at the bottom of the plot, and she had endeavored to find some trace of this man also.

Tom Jones was in prison and Arnold Dacre abroad—which fact she was not aware of—and she had become well-nigh discouraged in the pursuit of the object she desired to obtain.

She had procured a wig of dark hair, her own being naturally of a light tinge. She darkened her eyebrows and used a chemical to render her ordinarily clear, blonde complexion more brunette-like and dusky.

She dressed in plain black, went out but seldom, and until the night she had so strangely come face to face with Cecil Vivian, had met with no surprises.

To attempt to depict the varied emotions consequent upon that meeting would be futile. At first she felt that she must give way and betray herself.

Had the meeting been less abrupt; had any other circumstances surrounded her than those which actually did at the time of their meeting, she could not have controlled herself.

When she secreted him, however, that gave her a brief respite to control herself, and when the escaped prisoner and her former lover again confronted her she had steadied herself to a resolute course of action from which she did not deviate.

When he recognized or thought he detected some fancied resemblance to Ethel Wayne and went away satisfied that he was in error, she felt that her disguise was an effectual one under ordinary circumstances.

Once, twice she felt that she must speak to him, must reveal her true identity and implore him to confess to her all the truth of this horrible business; but should she do so and deter him from at once escaping it might imperil his liberty.

If guilty, she wanted him pardoned; if innocent, she knew that she could not conceal from his devoted heart the discernment of the truth that she still loved him. No; better time and trouble than haste and recapture to the poor, pale, troubled wreck for whom her heart bled.

Then came the news of his death, the finding of the body in the pit, and then a month of sickness, of raving delirium and wasting fever, and she came back to life feeble in body, but in mind as vigorous as ever.

Life was black, a dark, unhopeful pall, with no ray of light.

Henceforth she had but one object in life—revenge.

She would yet prove the innocence of her dead lover. She would yet bring to justice the plotter against his good name and liberty if the exposition involved honor, husband and friends.

His last words, "I am an innocent man," rung in her ears like an inspiration of light, and under that new resolve her nature changed from an innocent, suffering woman to a veritable Nemesis.

Doubt, anxiety, confusion, all reigned in her mind; nor could she discern one single clew which seemed to justify the theories she formed.

Of one thing she seemed positively certain—Cecil Vivian was dead. Be the mystery what it might, her eyes would not deceive her. The man she had saved from the officers of the law the night of his escape was, could be, no other than Cecil Vivian.

He had escaped temporarily, only to die in the pit beyond.

Thus she sat thinking, brooding theories; fanciful fabrications, built on solid facts, floated away and came again, only to be replaced by other facts built upon mythical creations; and then, in the whirl of her mind, as she thought of purchased liberty, of a substituted body, of a score of varied ideas, she at last sunk into a troubled and restless sleep.

She awoke the next morning early, and for the first time in a month took a walk in the garden.

As she neared the gate she started.

There, coming down the road and going toward the prison boat, was a man tanned, bloody and covered with dirt. Evidently he was a recaptured prisoner, and had been taken after a struggle.

He was heavily ironed and walked between a file of guards.

The woman's heart stood still as she recognized him. It was Tom Jones, the convict who had given her the warning on the night of her marriage.

He raised his eyes as he neared her, and she, nearly fainting, leaned on the gate for support.

He halted abruptly as he reached the road near the gate.

"Move on!" commanded the lieutenant of the guard gruffly. "You've made us trouble enough already in catching you."

"Hold on, my friend, one moment," said the man. "I've a word to say."

They halted unwillingly.

"You've had a struggle in catching me, haven't ye, now?"

"Yes, and we'll put a bullet through you if you bother us any more," returned the lieutenant.

"Then grant me a favor. I've an old mother, my friend, and I want her send a message to her. Grant me this one favor and I'll go on peacefully."

"Hurry up, then. What is it?" queried the lieutenant gruffly.

"Madam," he said, addressing Mrs. Dayton.

She lifted her eyes to his face. He was directly opposite and near her now, but never a token of former acquaintance showed itself in his words or manner.

"What is it, sir?"

"Will you do me a favor?"

"I? Certainly, sir," she replied in well-affected astonishment.

"Give me a pencil and paper."

The servant had come down to the gate, alarmed at the throng gathered there. Mrs. Dayton sent her after the necessary articles.

"Unloose one shackle," the convict said, holding out his manacled hands to the lieutenant.

The guard unlocked it.

"No trick, now, mind you," he said, warningly, keeping his pistol aimed at the convict's head as a perpetual threat.

"No, honor bright," said the man, as he took the pencil and slowly scrawled a few lines on the piece of paper. Then he handed it to Mrs. Dayton with the words:

"There, mum. River street, New York. Mrs. Catherine Wilson. You won't forget to send it, mum?"

Mrs. Dayton nodded her head.

"I will certainly fulfill your wishes."

"Thank you, mum," replied the convict, and holding out his hand received the manacle and moved on with a significant glance at Mrs. Dayton.

Ethel repaired to the house at once. She knew the letter and its writing to be a ruse. Once in the house she opened it.

Alas! moved by fear that the lieutenant might read it the cunning convict had written it in a mysterious cipher, little thinking that it would baffle the skill of its recipient, for to her it was a perplexing and puzzling enigma.

It read:

"The papers are 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, and D.'s letters.

"Gervaise Villas—Corn for they wdar-esto tuob xx psaeo from febt ecne. Dig."

That was all.

CHAPTER XIV.

PORTIA ANDRE.

Had a cannon-ball unexpectedly rooted up the ground where he stood, Gould Dayton could not have been more startled than he was at the sudden appearance of Cecil Vivian.

To him it was a ghostly revelation or a trick of his fancy, for Cecil Vivian was dead

and buried in the prison grave-yard at Sing Sing and Arnold Dacre, the only man who resembled him so remarkably, he had reason to know, had been placed most effectually out of his way.

It was Cecil who first spoke, and who first regained his composure.

Ever on the alert for surprises, he had carefully guarded against being led into any expression of action which would betray his real identity. He, therefore, despite the trepidation and lack of confidence he felt in himself to carry out his assumed character without a blunder before Gould Dayton, advanced, pale but smiling, and concealing his emotions as best he might, said coolly, as he presented his hand:

"Well, Dayton, we have met again."

The hand of Gould Dayton fell mechanically into the extended palm of the man who confronted him, but it was cold as ice and trembled violently.

The fleshy touch, the fact that either Arnold Dacre or Cecil Vivian stood before him in *propria persona*, was too evident to deny to his superstitiously inclined mind, and he partially shook off the terror which had chained him to the spot like a marble statue.

His hand fell nerveless from the grasp of the man before him, and as he clutched at the gate-post for support he gasped through bloodless lips the single word:

"Vivian!"

The false Arnold Dacre, the real Cecil Vivian, caught the cue dexterously. With the same marked smile upon his face he said jestingly:

"Vivian! Have you seen a ghost, Dayton, or have you given leave to your senses?"

The other was not reassured. His hand went up to his eyes in a dazed, unsteady manner.

He shuddered with a cowering look in his pale face, as he murmured, apparently scarcely conscious of what he said:

"I thought you were—"

"Dead?" laughed Cecil. "I don't die so easily, Dayton."

"Then the shot—"

"Was harmless, as you see," pursued the impostor in the same easy tone of voice, his companion little dreaming the intense anxiety going on within his mind, for Cecil Vivian too fully realized that Gould Dayton, confused, startled, taken at a disadvantage, might be led on and "pumped," but the same sharp-witted individual in his natural senses would never betray his own emotions or fail to read aright those of others.

The change came; a faint flush stole into the man's face; his eyes lost their haunted, startled expression; an awful picture of murder without cause, of crime without remorse, passed from his mind and left him his conscious, guarded, natural self.

"I have been dreaming," he said, with a sigh of relief, but in a changed tone of voice. "Well, Dacre, you are in the field again."

"And mean to stay, *mon ami*, notwithstanding your earnest endeavor to get rid of me."

The other scowled.

Before the man who knew him to be a villain of the deepest dye, he did not play his urbane, politic self. He openly avowed his true character, and said harshly:

"Arnold Dacre, once for all, I warn you never to cross my path again. I have nothing more to do with you or for you. Remember the hold I have upon you; remember that one word from me can send to prison the defaulting treasurer of the San Juan Stage Company. If my pistol failed me, if your fall in the pit did not finish you, it was no fault of mine."

For a second Cecil Vivian did not reply. He was meditating over the last words of his former secretary. Important revelations they contained for him, too, for they posted him on two points essential to his knowledge—the fact that Dayton had murdered Arnold Dacre, and that he was the D. referred to in Miss Clare's letters as the person who held so powerful an influence over her.

"My visit here is simply one of friendship, Gould," he said, in a conciliating tone of voice. "Miss Clare is a visitor here, and I also. You surely can have no objection to that."

"You have changed most wonderfully in your sentiments since your trip abroad. Why did you taunt me with your mutual love that night at the pit?" he queried, surprised and growlingly.

"Because you are most unreasonable in shutting me out from companionship with the woman I love. You forbid me to ap-

proach her. Do you love her? Do you intend to make her your wife?"

The question was ventured doubtfully as to its propriety or effect, but it drew a point-blank reply from the man.

"No matter whether I love her or not; she can never be yours. Does she not encourage your love? and yet you call this true friendship."

"Gould Dayton," said Cecil, in a determined tone of voice, bound to carry out the part of lover to Miss Clare which he had assumed, "tell me once for all what the secret of your power over Mabel Clare is; tell me if you do not intend to marry her, why you refuse to allow me to see her, to enjoy her company?"

"No, I will not!" thundered the secretary. "Take warning, once for all, and renounce all claims upon this woman. Finish your visit here and then leave her, or you will rue it."

The man passed on toward the house as he finished speaking.

Cecil Vivian, with an assumed moodiness of manner, kept by his side. Welcome or not, he determined to improve every opportunity to understand all the points of the case in hand, and he entered the drawing-room with his companion, watching narrowly the meeting between Dayton and Miss Clare, which was nothing more than might take place between friends, to all outward seeming, and then took a seat on the veranda by the open window.

From his half-embowered seat he could watch the interior of the room, and he noted distinctly the moodiness and silence of his cousin as he sat awaiting the departure of the evening's guests.

At last Mabel approached him. Her smile vanished as she met his glance, and a kind of fear seemed to come into her eyes. From his seat at the window on the veranda Cecil could overhear every word of their conversation.

"What has brought you down here?" he heard the woman ask of her companion.

"Business. I must see you alone."

"To-night?"

"At once."

"Meet me in the library, then, after the guests have retired," she said.

"No further flirtation with your gallant, Dacre," sneered Dayton, as she left his side. She cast a look of contempt upon him, half fearful, half defiant, while Cecil, entering the apartment, bade the occupants good-night and retired to his own room, but not to rest.

He turned down his light, locked the door, and coolly proceeded to take off his coat and superfluous clothing. Then as he saw the carriage drive up to the steps and depart with the guests, he stole silently down the front stairs, and unperceived, in his stocking-feet, reached the library.

He peered into the half-lighted apartment through the partially open door. It was vacant, and he passed into the room and unhesitatingly concealed himself and awaited developments.

He had not long to wait.

There entered the room a few minutes after he had come into it, his cousin, Gould Dayton.

He flung himself wearily into an arm-chair and awaited impatiently the arrival of Miss Clare. She was not slow in following, and closing the door after her, seated herself on the sofa directly opposite him.

If the part of a spy he was acting was repugnant to Cecil Vivian, the circumstances of the case fully justified him, in his own mind.

Surrounded by plotters, he himself must descend to their cunning and fight them with their own weapons, or abandon the field.

From the first he noticed that each of the two parties had assumed a belligerent attitude—Gould Dayton domineering and insolent, Miss Clare defiant and provoking.

"Well, Mabel," the man said, regarding her from under his frowning brows with a look of malevolent import, "I'm here again, and again you have Arnold Dacre with you."

The woman was silent, playing carelessly and indifferently with the tassels of her fan.

"In fact," pursued the man, with rising tones, "I forbid you to see him again after this visit is ended."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Mabel Clare, and I now understand you fully, and I read his shallow-pated fancy for you as if it were written on his

face. You will be eloping some day, and then—"

"Well, Mr. Dayton, and then what?" demanded the woman, looking up into his eyes with a mocking manner. "Am I so essential to your well-being that you fear such a termination to my flirtation with Mr. Dacre?"

"No, Mabel Clare," said the man in significant tones, "we understand each other too fully to jest. I neither love you nor am I jealous of Dacre. I know, without your telling me, that all the interest you take in me is so far as my purse-strings go, and that your forced servitude to my whims, as you term them, is galling and constrained. Give me up if you like, marry Arnold Dacre if you dare, but remember that the day you wed him he goes to prison and you back to the gutter and poverty."

The woman's cheeks blanched at the cruelly significant words of the man. She sat silent and with downcast eyes, neither regarding nor replying to his last insult.

"I trust you," proceeded the man, utterly indifferent to the emotion he was awakening in the breast of the woman before him, "just as I trusted Dacre—as far as your interest holds you to me, no further. Should I abandon you, do you know what awaits you?"

She shuddered slightly, but the downcast eyes never looked up at her merciless persecutor.

"Poverty! You could not earn your living at any business, for you do not understand any. Your beauty, the only dewy you possess, you are too prudish to barter for gold. To marry a penniless adventurer like Arnold Dacre means poverty linked to a man who would soon tire you."

There was a pause broken by neither for some time. Then the woman looked up, her eyes veiled, yet gleaming, her lips set, her face white.

"Are you through?" she asked. "Have you finished your tirade, or are you in a lecturing fit this evening?"

The man bit his lip in ill-disguised annoyance at the capability this woman possessed to conceal her emotions.

"Yes. I have nothing more to say."

"Then listen to me, Gould Dayton. You have paid me a price for acting a part. Now, then, what if I say that I repudiate you, that I end the farce and go back to my rags and misery? I am not foolish enough to threaten you with the betrayal of your secrets; that would do me no good, and only awaken your powerful hatred, and I fear your influence; but I can conclude our bargain at any time. You have no legal or moral hold upon me, and our feelings for one another are far from being friendly. Now, what?"

The man hesitated, fairly cornered.

For some time he sat regarding the woman before him with a look of malignant import; but she never quailed, never dropped her gaze under the gleam of his basilisk eyes. He felt that he had lost ground, but he said, after a long pause, in which his brain was active and devising some new argument to reduce her to subjection again:

"What then? I will tell you, Miss Mabel Clare—then we are quits; but come, Mabel, it won't do to quarrel. For a time, at least, our interests are identical—until that plan is carried out," and he laid his hand significantly upon her arm, "let us have no quarrel."

"Gould Dayton," replied the woman, shrinking from his touch, as he lightly pressed her arm, "listen to me, once for all. I fear you and you dislike me. I love Arnold Dacre and he returns that affection. I am a strong-willed woman, stopping at nothing to carry out a plan, except murder. I have no conscientious scruples to overcome. Choosing between the life of a low woman or the river, I adopted the latter as a means of rest to all earthly sorrow. You saved me and offered me the life and reward of an adventurer, a mere plotting, unnecessary instrument to carry out your projects. I have met a man whom I love. I wish to marry him. Why this objection to my wish?"

"I will tell you, Mabel," replied the man in a conciliatory tone of voice, for he saw that his former overbearing manner was at variance with the good-will of his emissary. "If you were married to Arnold Dacre, how long would his wife retain her knowledge of my secrets from him? I will, however, make you a proposition. Agree to carry out my scheme to its anticipated advantage; agree to dismiss your lover until then, and when I have paid you your share of this venture," he continued, flushing slight-

ly, "then you are at liberty to wed whom you please."

The woman's face cleared somewhat at the last declaration of the man who was her employer.

"And you pledge me your word of honor to seek to do no injury to Arnold Dacre?"

"I promise you."

"Then proceed to the business in hand you referred to."

"I will. From information I have received, I believe the man upon whom the immense fortune in which we are so deeply interested depends to be in New York. In fact, Hazri, the astrologer, is here. Within a few weeks the presentation of yourself as the daughter of Colonel Andre must be made and the fortune awarded."

"And then?"

"And then, Mabel, you are free to go where you will, do as you will."

There was a look of candor in the man's eyes as he spoke the words—insincerity in his soul. Never having been able to trifle with this woman—this strange anomaly, with no conscience but a tenacious regard for her purity—he had grown jealous of another man possessing her; he would risk much to incline her dishonorably to his evil desires.

That jealousy had once led him to an assault upon the object of his hatred and of her preferred lover, Arnold Dacre.

The man had escaped, and Gould Dayton had solemnly promised this woman to seek to injure him no further. His mind was, even now, in the face of all his pledges and asseverations of loyalty to those assertions, plotting against the future life and liberty of Arnold Dacre and the honor of the woman before him. Finally the woman spoke:

"You have heard nothing of your wife yet, Gould?"

The man's face darkened.

"No," he answered, abruptly.

"And her father?"

"Is dead."

The woman started.

"A sad history," she said slowly. "She left you upon your wedding-morn for the love of another, you say?"

"Yes."

"And you loved her?"

"I did."

"I pity you," said the woman in a sympathetic tone of voice. "To love your cousin as you did, to have him turn out as he did, to lose your wife, was indeed enough to make the world seem cold and loveless."

Gould Dayton frowned darkly. He had never told this woman the truth concerning his relations with Cecil Vivian and Ethel Wayne. As in other things he had misled her in regard to these.

"It may be a week, perhaps a month," said Dayton, "before I present you to Hazri, the astrologer. You understand the entire affair as I have given it to you?"

"Perfectly."

"As Pertia, you are entitled to the fortune. If you choose to retain your present name it is well and good. The mark on your arm indicates your right to the treasure and establishes beyond a doubt your real identity."

"Then you will be here soon again?" she asked of Dayton.

"Yes; perhaps within a week. Let us have no quarrels over Dacre until this affair is completed."

They soon left the apartment, and when all was still about the house Cecil stole from his place of espionage to his apartment and sat meditating thoughtfully over what had transpired in the library between Gould Dayton and Mabel Clare.

His eavesdropping, unpleasant as it was condemnatory, as his high-minded honor had caused him to regard such a nefarious proceeding, had been prelude of several important disclosures for his benefit.

It had developed the fact that Dayton simply held Miss Clare through monetary considerations. She was pure and loved Arnold Dacre. She might be the daughter of Colonel Andre, and her parentage and rights had probably been made manifest to her through Gould Dayton, who had required a portion of the treasure for his part in the proceedings.

He marveled wonderingly over the fact of Dayton's knowledge of the Andre secret and resolved to checkmate him in his endeavor to secure the lion's share of the rich dowry promised the daughter of Colonel Andre by the mystic society of the Brethren of the Rhod.

And so the plot within the plot had reached its culminating point, or soon must do so. He had taken a leap in the dark; he had as-

sumed an identity into which he had fallen naturally and undetected.

He was firm in his position now. Although threatened by an anonymous enemy, and openly menaced by Gould Dayton, yet over it all hung the shadow of a crime—the sin of that one weak moment in his life when he had signed the overissue of stocks haunted and pursued him.

Gould Dayton was married and his wife had left him. What new mystery was here? Wearied and perplexed with myriads of doubts and surmises he sunk to rest.

CHAPTER XV.

EUNICE DANE.

Miss Clare's male visitors were few, and upon the score of entire fidelity and an openly avowed preference for his companionship, Cecil had no reason to find fault.

She was ever the same vivacious, candid being, friendly and entertaining, yet never unmaidenly or free with him.

He entertained a sentiment of warm admiration for her, and wondered at the strange inconsistencies of her character.

One day he spoke of love and marriage; began his tale in the serious, earnest tone of voice which were habitual with him; but she stopped him in her pretty, capricious way, by putting her fingers in her ears and giving utterance to a little scream of dismay.

"Forbidden grounds, sir knight," she said. "You are on probation, remember, and I have pledged my word to my jailer that we will be properly behaved children until my lord relieves the embargo."

Cecil was silent, momentarily relieved. He felt a sickening weight at heart when he meditated what might be this woman's emotions when he told his whole story.

It must come out sooner or later, if he wedded her, and then—

He grew sad and wretched when he thought of it.

"My lord has a wife," said he, after a pause. "What claim can he have upon you?"

"Trespassing again, my knight. Have patience. Give me credit for my aversion to other society than your own."

"Patience till when?" he asked, determined to face the issue.

"Until—"

She blushed prettily, and avoided his searching gaze.

"Must I propose and do the love-making, sir knight?" she asked, with arch coyness.

"Seriously," replied Cecil, "you know my earnest wish—your hand in marriage."

"Your trip abroad has made you quite sedate and serious," laughed Mabel. "Instead of fervent protestations of love, or wild, jealous invectives against my lord, you calmly ask my hand as if the heart were an after-consideration. However, sir knight, we understand one another, and when Gould Dayton has completed a scheme he is engaged in at present, and to aid him in which my endeavors are pledged, I will not only listen to all your proposals, but—"

"Accept them?" queried Cecil, smilingly.

"Has Mr. Dayton heard from his wife recently?"

He changed the conversation purposely, venturing the question upon what he had heard the night before in the library.

She little thought that an adroit eavesdropper had overheard her conversation with Gould Dayton.

"No; it was a singular circumstance. Wedded at morn, deserted before noon."

"I was abroad when the event occurred, you know," pursued Cecil. "Was the lady who acted so mysteriously known to you personally?"

"No; Miss Wayne did not come within the limited circle of my acquaintance in New York society."

"Miss Wayne!" ejaculated Cecil, with a start of surprise.

"Why, certainly," replied Miss Clare, regarding his astonishment with amazement.

"That was Mr. Dayton's wife's name—Miss Ethel Wayne."

There was no need to ask Cecil Vivian if he knew her; the pale face, the startled eyes, the dumfounded manner of the young man, told the quick, searching eyes of Mabel Clare that a terrible struggle of emotions was going on in his mind.

"This is sudden," he murmured, hoarsely, his head growing cold, his mind agonized, torn, racked with contending thoughts.

"Are you sure of this?"

"I am positive. Did you know her, Arnold?"

"Yes, I knew her; she was the affianced of

a man I knew—Mr. Dayton's cousin, Cecil Vivian."

The reference to Vivian caused a diversion in his favor, and he was calm and self-possessed in a minute.

"Cecil Vivian your friend?" she said, with a peculiar emphasis on the last word, as she regarded him with a curious expression of face.

"Rather an acquaintance," said Cecil. "Do you drive to-day, Mabel?"

"Yes," and then the conversation turned into different channels.

The day passed. The night, with a radiant moon swinging high in the starry vaults of heaven, came out and found Cecil Vivian promeneading within the grounds of Gervaise Villa.

These solitary walks quieted and composed him and prepared him more effectually to carry out the rôle he was enacting—the stolen identity of dead Arnold Dacre.

He wandered beneath the trees leading to the remote grounds of the villa, when he came abruptly upon a female form.

It was enveloped in a shade-bonnet and a long, close-fitting mantle, and the attitude was one as if searching for something on the ground, for the eyes were steadfastly bent to the ground.

There was a break in the hedge at this point and the stranger had evidently entered thence from the road.

As the footsteps of the approaching man sounded upon the woman's hearing she started to an upright attitude and the moon fell full upon her face.

A low cry of startled terror broke from her lips, instantly suppressed as the man, his features veiled in the shadow of his broad sombrero, concealed the emotion which the meeting caused him.

The woman was the same who had saved him from recapture at the hands of the prison authorities at the little cottage on the outskirts of the village of Gratiot upon the night of his escape from the prison.

It was Ethel—Gould Dayton's disguised wife.

In a moment the man was on his guard. Whatever emotions this abrupt meeting caused, whatever memories that pale, sad face, so similar to the face of one long lost—forever lost to him—awoke, he felt he must conceal in this woman's presence. She, more startled, said simply:

"Pardon, sir. I believe we have met before."

The voice grew more reserved. The woman turned so that her face was lost in the shadow of the bonnet she wore, yet that single glance of her face had revealed to Cecil Vivian suffering and sickness since he had last seen her.

"It is rather late to be abroad unattended. Do you reside in the village?" he asked, politely.

"Yes."

The mind of the woman, turbulent, perplexed, in doubt, bade her remain where she was.

She wanted to know more of the person who was either Cecil Vivian or his ghost to her excited mind.

"Then, if you are going home and have tired of wandering here, allow me to escort you," he said, respectfully. "Or would you come up to the house? Gervaise Villa has a free welcome for all villagers, and Mrs. Postlewaite must know you if you are living in the town."

In his earnestness to know more of her, to place himself in a favorable light before this woman in whom he had taken so strange an interest, he had come to her side and tendered her his arm. She hesitated a moment and then placed her hand timidly upon it.

He noticed that it trembled violently.

"I am not acquainted at the villa," she said. "I am a stranger here."

"I have startled you," he said. "Which way?"

"They had reached the broken hedge. She pointed down the road leading in the direction he had taken that eventful night of his escape from prison, and said with a nervous little laugh:

"You are a stranger to me, but a gentleman, and I gladly accept your escort. I had wandered quite a distance from home and might have found some difficulty in retracing my steps but for your kindness. I have been convalescent from a long and severe spell of sickness but a few days, and had taken an evening stroll. I find my strength unequal to such a long walk."

She leaned heavily on his arm as she spoke.

He little knew that it was the emotions

which his sudden appearance had caused which made her momentary weakness; he little comprehended the wonderful and varied thoughts running riot in her excited and perplexed brain.

"You thought you had seen me before?" he said, inquiringly.

"Yes, it was a—fancied resemblance," she said, strangely.

"It could not have been me unless recently. I have been abroad for nearly two years."

"Do you reside at the villa?" she asked.

"No, I am a visitor there. I am Arnold Dacre—a friend—"

He stopped suddenly. She had withdrawn her hand from his arm as though it burned with a red-hot iron.

Then this was the man who had been one of the party who had murdered her lost love! In that moment of supreme hatred for the persecutors of her lost darling, in the face of this man's steady composure and calmness, she no more doubted his identity as that of the veritable Arnold Dacre than she doubted her own existence.

The remarkable resemblance between the two struck her forcibly, but the change two years had effected in Cecil Vivian since she had last seen him went far to establish the right in her mind of this man to the character he assumed.

She saw her fault as the man stared at her mutely and made a feint as if arranging her shawl about her more closely, then replaced her hand upon his arm.

The movement was so natural that her companion was deceived as to the real cause of her withdrawing her hand from his arm.

"I am Mrs. Dane," she said when she had regained her composure. "I am a widow and live in that little white cottage you see gleaming yonder in the moonlight."

She pointed to a house some distance away across the fields as she spoke.

They crossed the meadow, making the way shorter by a quarter of a mile.

Their conversation turned on generalities as they walked on, but when they reached the gate leading into the yard of the little house she did not ask him to come in.

He noticed the lack of an extension of this courtesy and said, boldly:

"I shall hope to meet you again, Mrs. Dane. In this humdrum village an entertaining acquaintance is not to be lightly lost."

"I am so retired here," she began falteringly.

"I shall call to see if the night dews have put you on the sick-list again," he said, politely. "Good-night, Mrs. Dane."

"Good-night," she said as he lifted his hat and walked slowly away over the meadows.

She stood by the gate watching his tall form until it was lost in the misty distance.

How like and yet how unlike was this man to her lost love. How often had she watched him thus, but with what different emotions.

As a wife she had no right even to see him were he that lost love, and instead of that he was one of her dead lover's murderers.

What active part he had taken in the plot against his honor and life she did not know, and now with a full acquaintance with this man, with the possibility of securing his confidence and furthering the ends of justice, should she hesitate? No; the politeness of the gentleman, which evinced itself in every action, might cover a villain's heart. Patience, courage! revenge and an honorable justification for Cecil Vivian's memory. Let that thought sustain her, she mused, and lead her to encourage this man's acquaintance and friendship.

But was not Arnold Dacre a friend of Gould Dayton? Might he not bring that person here by some fated accident? Might not the course of their friendship naturally lead to such an undesirable result?

This recognition on the part of Gould Dayton, should she meet him, she must avert by more effectually disguising herself in minor points, and she had not invited Cecil Vivian into the house that night on this account. She would endeavor to change her resemblance to the Ethel Wayne of old as much as possible, and then to lead this man, Arnold Dacre, on.

Villain that she believed him to be, she saw that he was impressive.

She would wring his secrets from him, and if possible wring his heart as hers had been, and then for revenge on Gould Dayton, then for the vindication of her lost lover!

Cecil Vivian went home silent, thoughtful, moody. What memories this woman had awakened in his mind. What chords

had she caused to vibrate within his heart, such as had lain dull and inert for many a month.

If his life had lost all its sweetness when he had lost Ethel Wayne, this strange woman had awakened at least a thrilling interest in her welfare, a longing desire to see more of her.

To have acknowledged that it was the beginning of an interest which friendly attention and companionship with its object might foster and nurture into a love less intense than the first passion he had ever known, but still fervent and deep, at that moment would have been regarded as an impossible folly by him, yet slowly and unconsciously the face of Mrs. Dane was filling his heart and mind, and his thoughts of her were growing into thoughts such as only come with the dawning of love.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE KISS OF LOVE.

It is not our intention to follow step by step the progress of Cecil Vivian toward the grand culmination of the plot. Suffice it for the present to say that without the remotest suspicion of the real identity of Ethel Dayton, despite his knowledge of the fact of her desertion of her husband, he went to see her daily. For one week succeeding the night upon which he had met Mrs. Dane in the grounds of Gervaise Villa, each morning, under the pretense of inquiring concerning her health, of bringing her books and flowers, under the guise of a score of little excuses, he gained an hour or more of her company.

She was her own bright self in his presence, always endeavoring to entertain him to the fullest extent of her nature. Sometimes he lost all consciousness of the present in her presence, dreaming, under the potent, magnetic influence of her changing ways, that he was back to the old sweet life which had been blest with the smile of Ethel Wayne. So day by day she led him on, drew him out, enchanted him with a spell, the weaving of which was wrought with vengeful interest, the end of which could not fail to bring misery, agony and remorse.

For this man exercised over her a power which made her fail and falter when she thought of the future. The polish of his outward nature she found was no shallow pretense, but innate good-breeding, the high sentiments of his mind, expressed the true nobility of a pure and sinless soul. She could not in his presence but acknowledge the rare grace of his nature, the high moral tone of his mind. So like her dead lover was he that often she found herself wondering if it were not Cecil Vivian and not Arnold Dacre whom she was leading on to love her only that she might draw from him the secrets she so desired to know, and then leave him in scorn to suffer as she had suffered, to feel all the stings of unrequited love and remorse which his perfidy and persecution of Cecil Vivian deserved.

That secret she never learned from his lips. When she spoke of Cecil Vivian it was briefly and with an open avowal of only a casual acquaintance with him.

If the man knew much of the plot against Vivian, she found he guarded his knowledge closely, and so the time wore on pleasantly to him when he was with her, but sorrowfully, sadly, when he was alone or with Mabel Clare.

The latter neither questioned him as to his absent hours nor noticed his gloomy indifference to her.

The agreement that neither should speak of love or marriage while her employment by Gould Dayton existed was a fair and effectual barrier behind which he took refuge in atonement for his apparent neglect of her.

Gould Dayton for a week did not appear at the villa, and on the score of his promise to Colonel Andre, Cecil Vivian felt he could do nothing at present. Fortia, his daughter—Mabel Clare—only knew by some strange combination of circumstances of her parentage and of the expected treasure. To this woman he was tacitly engaged. He thought with a pang of the young widow in the cottage, of the loveless bride so willing to become his. He could do nothing. Gould Dayton was watching the case, and he had but to wait until the treasure was in sight, and then reveal as much or as little as he liked of her true history or of his claim upon her given him by her father. When the time came he would see that Fortia received her rights, and that Gould Dayton did not obtain the lion's share in the scheme he had in hand.

All unconscious was he of the fact that there was a silent watcher upon his track, a man who with cunning pertinacity and patient slyness studied his every action, Jean Darschels, his valet. Never did a detective work more silently, more earnestly—never did a smiling face and polite exterior indicate the outward semblance of a shallow mind alive only to politic endeavors in his peculiar capacity, more perfectly hide beneath all this a mind bent upon solving the enigmatical problem of like and unlike—of the similarity and dissimilarity existing between the Arnold Dacre of old and the Arnold Dacre of the present.

So Monsieur Jean took it into his mind to not only follow his master in the day-time at a distance, but to trace his footsteps more closely at night. Skillful and adroit, he managed to evade suspicion and detection, and as Mrs. Dane played a conspicuous part in the case in hand, he fell to watching her.

One evening Cecil had gone on a mission for Miss Clare to the village and Jean started quietly toward the little white cottage where Mrs. Dane resided. Whatever his object was or the theories his mind contained, he was a close adherent to his cause, for he carefully noted everything and went to an enormous amount of trouble, apparently only to satisfy an idle curiosity. Upon this especial evening there was no moon or stars, and the indications in the fast-gathering clouds and heavy atmosphere were those of an approaching storm. He crept around to the side of the house where there was no light, peered in through the shutters, and there saw Mrs. Dane sitting at the table. She held a piece of paper before her, a rude, unlettered scrawl, with badly formed figures and enigmatical characters.

Mrs. Dane was busily engaged at the mysterious letter left her by Tom Jones, the convict, when he was arrested.

For many days she had puzzled her brain over the enigma, and to-night she had formed a theory which she hoped would lead her to a revelation of the true import of the message.

The rude letter written by Tom Jones, as has been already stated, puzzled her not a little.

She did not accredit the man with possessing a sufficiently high grade of intellect to invent a definite system.

She knew that he was desirous of putting her on the track of the papers mentioned, yet hesitated to divulge their hiding-place openly, and any whispered conversation with her, even if granted at the time by the lieutenant of the guard, might be reported as a suspicious feature of his rearrest and involve her in trouble, or at least place her under surveillance and suspicion.

With all the man's roughness he was no fool, and she felt grateful toward him for his consideration in her behalf.

He had written the message under the eye of the lieutenant, although the soldier paid but little attention to its contents, and she had wondered what it meant.

She had transposed it, reversed it, and attempted to elucidate some system from its staggling disorder.

Its construction, however, evidently involved a laborious mechanism. It was a hit-or-miss enigma made as plain as the convict dared to write without openly stating his mission.

She could not visit him at the prison, he knew, and this was the only opportunity to impart the intelligence he could not convey to her except under the veil of a cipher.

"The papers are 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, and D's letters."

"Gervaise Villa—Corn fore they wdar—esta tub xx psaeo from feht eone. Dig."

So read the missive of the convict and examiner, Tom Jones.

Now for its solution.

The numbers she knew must relate to some papers numerically arranged.

Rejecting the former as something she knew not of, but referring to the case, she attempted the elucidation of the latter part of the perplexing message.

As her eyes became more accustomed to the writing before her, she saw that two different ideas had prevailed in the mind of its author. One was the use of four letters of a word proper, then four reversed; thus: Corn (fore) er of the y (radw) and west a (toub) bout—here the system merged into irregularities, subtraction—(xx) 20 (psaeo) from (feht) the f (eone) ence. Dig. The problem stood revealed to her:

Gervaise Villa, corner of the yard, west about twenty paces from the fence. Dig.

In her mind she went over the topography of the place. The fence ran north and south and west would be outside of the villa grounds.

She resolved to repair at once to the grounds, and putting on a light hat and a shawl, she hurried from the house in the direction of the villa, followed closely by the unsuspected spy upon her actions, Jean Darschels.

She reached the corner of the low fence which separated the grounds of Gervaise Villa from the adjoining place. The spot was a barren, uncultivated piece of ground, with no fence surrounding it. Here and there an occasional tree afforded slight shelter and shade, and as she started in a direct line twenty paces west from the corner of the garden wall of Gervaise Villa, she found that the requisite number of steps mentioned on the piece of paper handed her by the convicted led her to the foot of one of these trees.

She examined the ground carefully, and then started as a few rain-drops fell pattering down, and the breeze went sighing mournfully through the trees of the villa, like the moan of some restless and lost spirit seeking rest and finding none.

Then she knelt down and examined the ground around the foot of the oak tree, more with her hands than her vision, for the dim, imperfect light of the evening revealed only the faint outlines of a pile of loose clay around one side of the tree.

Ah! she trembled with expectation and eagerness as she saw that the ground here was looser than on the other side of the tree. With her white, delicate hands she tore up the clods, and flung handful after handful of earth to one side.

Finally a low, exultant cry arose to her lips.

In the excitement of the moment, in the eager joy at having surely discovered the hiding-place of the box of papers so important to her cause, so fatal to the interests of the persecutors of Cecil Vivian, she gave utterance to words of significant import.

"At last!" she murmured. "The convict did not deceive me. Arnold Dacre or Cecil Vivian, whichever died that eventful night, these papers will tell."

She wrenched laboriously at the little ring in the top of a small oblong tin box, too impatient to wait to remove the remaining earth around it.

The rain had begun to descend, the wind was singing in a dreary monotone through the leaves of the trees, and a tempest was surely indicated, but she saw nothing of all this, saw nothing of the form which, standing half hidden by the oak, had watched her every movement with intense curiosity and interest.

She arose to her feet, and as a momentary feeling of blindness passed over her from her weakness and recent efforts, she uttered a cry such as the panther gives expression to when robbed of her young, for the box was snatched from her hand, and she became dimly conscious of a human form darting away in the darkness.

Lost! lost! After all the struggle the main link in the chain of evidence was missing.

Sick at heart, utterly prestrated by the effects of the daring theft, she turned and staggered away from the spot, blindly, confusedly, not knowing whither she went. She reached the road, wet and with bedraggled garments.

A weak, fluttering sensation came over her, and then, under the mental and physical strain which had been too severe upon her system, she fell prone to the earth.

Jean Darschels, the valet, the spy, the purloiner of the precious box of papers, sped on in the darkness and through the night.

To him, as to others, these papers might mean the unraveling of a perplexing mystery.

Hastening on thus, he was not aware of the pursuer upon his track; he did not know that the game he was playing was a three-handed one, in which the reserve card was the winning one.

He afterward had a dim idea of a sudden blow on the neck, a deadly falling into insensibility, and when he awoke, wet and sore, and dragged himself to the villa, the box was missing.

This stormy night was a fateful one to all concerned in the tragedy which involved so much to the characters of our story. It was fateful to Gould Dayton, for at that hour he was hastening down to Gratiot with important intelligence for Mabel Clare; it was fateful to Tom Jones, for it eventually re-

leased him from a penal servitude that had been doubled on account of his former escape; it was fateful to Ethel Dayton and to Cecil Vivian, for as the woman lay insensible there by the roadside, a horse and buggy, driven rapidly toward the villa, stopped abruptly as it reached the spot where she lay, the steed terrified and balky at so unusual an impediment in his progress, and as Cecil Vivian, the occupant of the vehicle, leaped to the ground and raised the prostrate form, his first action was to utter a cry of surprise, and the next to imprint upon those cold lips a fervent kiss of love.

CHAPTER XVII.

FACE TO FACE.

Yes, it was a kiss of love—such a greeting as had not passed the lips of Cecil Vivian for two long years—an expression of ardent affection such as he had never expected to pass his lips again, such as only this woman, besides that other love, Ethel Wayne, could win from him. The hour, the circumstances, the place, all were treacherous to the barriers of reserve and duty he had thought himself safely installed behind. He lifted her in his strong arms and into the buggy, laid her head tenderly on his shoulder, and turning the horse, directed his way slowly toward the cottage where Mrs. Dane lived.

What cared he for the rain or the wind or the storm? What thought he of the woman awaiting his return at Gervaise Villa, his pledged wife?

In that moment of supreme bliss, love triumphed over all minor considerations, and he chafed the pallid brow and kissed the cold lips, applying endearing names to the insensible form lying inert in his arms.

He never stopped to think of the strange visit of this woman to Gervaise Villa—he never thought of the equivocal position this outburst of passion was placing him in.

He only felt the love of his heart centered on this woman surging up like a turbulent ocean which could not be stilled, and thinking thus and acting thus, the opening eyes of the woman coming back to life with a fluttering sigh caught the ardent look of these burning eyes, heard the murmured words: "My darling, my own," started at the passionate whispering of his love, and almost shrunk from his arms with a low cry of terror, alarm, and dismay.

"The box! the papers! Where am I?" she uttered, confused, dazed, uncertain if this was not some dream.

"Be calm," spoke Vivian, in rapturous accents. "Providence sent me to your aid. You were lying in the road as I was returning from the village."

She shrunk back from his caressing touch with an emotion which sent the blood rushing through every artery with redoubled force. How she loved this man!—for what he was, for the mysterious affinity he seemed to possess toward Cecil Vivian!

Like a tide then surged up her vow, her duty, her position. Another man's wife. Pledged to the fulfillment of a sacred trust, should she falter at this opportune moment? Never! If it tore her heart into a thousand fragments, she must pursue steadily the course her own conscience had instituted, her own resolves had determined to carry to a successful fruition.

"Unhand me, sir!" she said, sternly, coldly, in a tone of voice which sent a despairing chill to the heart of the man beside her. "This is unseemly conduct for a gentleman, Mr. Dacre."

He quailed before the indignant eyes flashing scorn, surprise and anger upon him.

"Fardon," he said, humbly, brokenly. "I had dared to hope—"

She uttered a low, light, scornful laugh.

"Hope?" she echoed, in bitter tones of voice. "I led you to hope. I encouraged you, and for what purpose—can you tell me that?"

He was silent, and as they reached the gate-way, dismounted and lifted her from the carriage, and then, with bowed heads, both walked up the gravel path leading to the house and up on the veranda.

The very demon of unrest pervaded the woman that night.

As the tempest tore by, her own turbulent soul gathered strength from its fierceness and aided and abetted her desire to torture this man, to be avenged for the sake of Cecil Vivian. Strange inconsistency! Love torturing its object—revenge and justness battling with affection.

"Listen to me, Arnold Dacre," she went on, "for the time has come when I must speak and I shall speak the truth. Day by day, week by week, I have led you on by all

the arts a woman knows, playing on the tenderest chords of your heart, deluding you, deceiving you—I have led you to love me. Do you know why? To spurn you, to scorn your love as I would that of the lowest convict in yonder prison. I hate you, Arnold Daore; I loath you, I despise you!"

He stood regarding her with a look in which agony, surprise and wonderment took away his speech for the time being. The outburst was so sudden, so unexpected, that he was petrified, astounded.

"Do you know why I have done this?" she continued, her voice rising, her features flashing fire, and her whole being enwrapped in the cause she was vindicating. "It is revenge. As you and your vile confederates plotted against and murdered the only man I ever loved—Cecil Vivian—so have I sworn to be revenged upon you. If my woman's wit has failed to force you to a confession of your part in that nefarious plot, I have at least wounded you at your tenderest part. I, Ethel Wayne, whose heart you and your vile fellow-conspirators have broken, swear to follow you out, to track you to your doom, to vindicate the honor of Cecil Vivian."

"Ethel!" wonderment, surprise, doubt in the word.

The man sprang forward. Half way to the woman's side he was thrust rudely away, and the light shining from the lamp in the hall through the open door-way revealed a startling tableau—Cecil Vivian reaching his hands toward Ethel Wayne and Gould Dayton confronting his runaway wife.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DEPIED.

It was indeed Gould Dayton, her husband, who, at that critical moment when Cecil Vivian might have revealed himself in his proper person and have solved all this sad, wretched misery, appeared between the two lovers.

He had arrived at Gratiot on the evening train, had started on foot for the villa, and the rain coming on, had stepped within the veranda of the little white cottage, little dreaming of the result of his action.

Never at a disadvantage when he felt secure of his power, he did not hesitate to assume his prerogative at this time.

As he thrust Cecil Vivian aside he muttered:

"You are not particular as to your loves, Daore. I warn you that any further interference in this quarter will meet with somewhat more severe measures than your escapade with Miss Clara. Go! I will see that my wife needs no assistance from you!"

Vivian turned from the veranda without a word. The woman had spurned him; the man held him in his power.

Yet a fierce triumph burned in his heart as he thought how this woman loved him, how steadfast and true she was to him, despite time and sorrow and care; but a jealous pang seized his heart as he thought of her being left alone with the man she was compelled to call her husband. There was no way out of it; he must resign all hopes of her, but he would never cease to love her never!

He drove back to Gervaise Villa wild with a score of varied contending emotions and retired to his room and spent the night in weary, restless thought.

Before her husband, in the presence of this man to whom she was legally wedded, the strong spirit of Ethel Wayne quailed.

She knew his nature, she knew his right, she knew he would not hesitate to use his power and compel her to his wishes, and as he took her by the arm and led her into the sitting-room she sunk pale and exhausted into a chair.

Her servant—an old Scotch lady, Mrs. Thorne—looked inquiringly and suspiciously at the man, not at first recognizing him.

"A wet night, Mr. Daore. Ye should not keep out a night like this, sir."

"I am not Mr. Daore," replied Dayton. "I am this lady's husband, and I want you to get these wet clothes off her at once and make her comfortable."

The servant stared from the man to the woman in mute surprise as she sat pale and utterly downfallen at the turn affairs had taken, and then going to her pointed to the wet and bedraggled garments, saying simply:

"Ye're wet and cold, me leddy, after yer recent sickness. It'll ill abide ye to remain in this condition."

The woman's words brought her back to the realities of life.

She walked from the apartment erect,

with majestic mien, not deigning a single glance at her husband.

He, with a quick glance around the apartment, when she had gone, took in the contents of the room, and then walked over to the mantel-piece, kicking the mud off his boots upon the iron fender.

A few minutes elapsed, when the door opened and the servant entered the room.

"Ye'll be likely to exouse my leddy for this evening, sir," she said, with a courtesy. "She's ill frae the exposure and fright loike an'll behappy to see yeagin in the mornin'."

"I'll do nothing of the sort," replied the man, in an irascible tone of voice. "Just tell Mrs. Dayton if she don't come to me I'll go to her."

"Yes, sir, I'll do it," replied the woman, retreating in trepidation before the frowning gaze of the man. "It ain't fer me to judge, but folks do be most uncommon disagreeable nowadays."

The man paced the floor with an impatient stride, awaiting some demonstration from the other room.

So long, indeed, was the interval between the last appearance of the servant and the indications of the reappearance of his wife, that Gould Dayton had his hand on the knob as the door opened and his wife confronted him.

She was still pale and somewhat agitated, but the few minutes she had been alone had sufficed to restore her composure of mind, and she walked to a seat and turned her eyes full upon him.

"Well, madam," said Dayton, in an angry tone of voice, "we meet again, it seems."

"Yes, Gould Dayton; evil wind that blew you hither! We meet again, but not as friends. Say what you have to say, terminate this interview as soon as possible, and leave my house."

"Your house!" sneered the man, growing fairly livid in the effort to suppress his passion. "Since when has the law allowed a wife to maintain a separate establishment, out of which she may bar her husband at her will and pleasure?"

"The law, you may find, which gives you a fancied power over me at present, also grants a remission from the marital duties under certain circumstances. Do not handle edged tools, Mr. Dayton," she said, with an inflection of the severest irony in her voice.

He frowned still more darkly, and regarded her sharply.

"Then you repudiate our marriage?"

"Utterly."

"And refuse to accept me in the position the law has placed me?"

"I do."

The man laughed a harsh, grating, discordant laugh.

"Do you know me?" he asked with an evil gleam in his eyes which made her shudder. "Do you know, my lady, that your father being dead I am your only near relative on earth?"

"I knew he was dead."

"Ah, then you kept yourself informed, doubtless, of my proceedings."

"Better than you think."

There was an undertone of menace in her words.

"Then you know that I am wealthy; that my business talent and expert financial management have evolved a fortune out of the Alameda mines."

"Yes, Gould Dayton, I have heard you are rich. But all your riches cannot tempt me to remain in your power. Your wealth is built upon the ruin of others, your reputation on a false basis, your plans on shifting sands. One day you will fall; one day the wreck and ruin into which you led your cousin, Cecil Vivian, will rebound upon yourself. There is a Nemesis on your track. There is one whom your wealth cannot buy, your influence bribe to silence."

"And that person is—"

"Myself. Slowly but surely the evidence against you and your co-conspirator, Arnold Daore, has accumulated. Patiently I have watched you; patiently I shall labor until the end. When I accuse you of leading to ruin the man I loved, whose memory I still love, it will not be a proofless victory. Beware!"

The man paled despite himself, but he said, steadily:

"Madam, as my wife, I shall act as I choose toward you. I go to-night. To-morrow we will test the validity of my rights as a husband."

He walked straight from the apartment as he spoke, through the darkness and rain, but not to Gervaise Villa.

Back to the village he went and into the depot. The telegraph office was open. He

took up two blanks, and a few minutes later there flashed over the wires, one to Newtown, twenty miles distant, the other to New York City:

"ADAM WESTLAKE:—Place the cottage on sea-shore in order and expect visitor.
"G. D."

The other ran:

"WILLIAM BOWLER:—Come at once. Gratiot Hotel.
"G. D."

He waited hour after hour. At last, toward midnight, the wires clicked and the clerk handed him a message. It read:

"GOULD DAYTON:—O. K. A. W."

He seated himself with a smile of satisfaction on his lips, and smoked cigar after cigar. Toward morning a second dispatch was handed him, which contained the following words:

"GOULD DAYTON:—I start for Gratiot at 7 A. M. W. B."

He folded the dispatch, placed it in his pocket-book, and walked toward Gervaise Villa.

The rain was coming down in torrents, the landscape was dreary and wan. As he passed the cottage where Mrs. Dane lived, he glanced toward it with a peculiar smile on his lips.

"Sleep, my lady; but before another night comes I'll have you where you won't trouble me for a time. My plans are too near fruition to have you mar them. When these are carried out, then I'll attend to taming you."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ASTROLOGER.

All silent in Grog Lane, sin-haunted, crime-coursed thoroughfare of the great and populous city of New York.

A singular place, this, to introduce our readers, yet it is here, in the upper portion of a building used as a pawn shop, that a scene is being enacted which claims our attention and forms one of the links in the chain of incidents which go to connect and make up our narrative.

The door leading to the room above was of heavy oak, doubly barred and locked, the upper windows shuttered and bolted, the rooms plainly but neatly furnished. Here at a table, upon the day succeeding that upon which Gould Dayton had discovered his missing wife, was seated a man of peculiar face and bearing, whose white hair and long beard gave him a patriarchal appearance.

This individual was the astrologer. Seated at a table, perusing a large and time-worn book filled with writing, it would have been difficult to have readily discerned his nativity. He was dark-skinned and had many peculiarities of the Jew, combined with the characteristics of the natives of South America in contour and form.

His bright, restless eyes bespoke a certain activity of thought, and his parchment-like face was volatile in its varied expressions.

Suddenly there was a loud knock at the door below, resounding through the lonely house.

A young man appeared, clothed in oriental attire, who greeted the astrologer with a profound salam.

"The door," said the astrologer, briefly. "Remember, admit no prying or inquisitive strangers."

The lad made a respectful obeisance and withdrew.

There was the sound of parleying at the entrance below, heavy footsteps ascended the stair-way, and there entered a man attired in ragged garments, such as a common laborer would have scorned to wear.

The covering for his head was a small, closely fitting skull-cap, his under suit of clothes of that peculiar mixed cloth, gray and black striped, which his worn only by one set of men, and the long, light overcoat, which did not conceal the prison suit, nor the feet almost bare, was tattered and in shreds.

His beard was long and straggling, his hair matted and unkempt, his glittering eyes and thin, wan face, indicative of suffering and hunger.

The astrologer looked askance at this penitentiary-bird just escaped, for no one could doubt him to be such, and roused out of his

wanted composure and dignity, arose to his feet with an inquiring glance.

The pale, wan man was Colonel Andre, the escaped prisoner from Sing Sing. His forehead was bound with a dirty and blood-stained cloth, and his clothes were wet and uncleanly.

He removed his hat as he stood in the august presence of the astrologer, more as an apology for his uncouth appearance than from any awe or fear, and putting one hand into the breast of his coat, drew forth a piece of newspaper.

At sight of the paper and the paragraph pointed out by the thin, trembling finger of the convict, the old man started.

"I have come here in reference to that advertisement," said the man, in a hoarse, weary tone of voice. "I have swam rivers, forded streams, climbed mountains, and run the gauntlet of the entire police force of New York City to answer it. If I can throw some light upon that advertisement, am I welcome? I will make my assertion to that effect if it will gain me a meal before I go further, for I am famishing."

The old astrologer's face changed to a friendly look from the one immediately preceded it of surprise and dubious hospitality toward the intruder.

He motioned him to a seat, spoke a few whispered words to his attendant, who quickly disappeared, and then, resuming his seat at the table, said, simply:

"You have suffered."

"Suffered! Have you ever been an inmate of a prison? Have you ever escaped only to receive a ball in the head sufficient to blunt the senses, and yet prevent utter unconsciousness? Have you ever clung for four mortal hours in the cold, chilling waters to a rough stone wall, and then, cramped and in the momentary fear of being recaptured, swam a mile or more to shore? This I have done, but this was nothing to what I have suffered since. Ah! look not at me and wonder that I thus openly confess myself an escaped convict to you, for to the prison authorities I am a dead man, and no friend of the Brethren of the Blood will refuse me hospitality and confidence."

"Then you are—"

"Colonel Andre. Nay, do not start. Too well do I know that one word to you—and that word I could utter—would bring my friends of the order to my relief. I might boldly have ventured hither before, for I was called dead; but my prison clothes disclosed me at least an escaping convict. I have starved, almost died, for over a month in coming hither—hiding, slinking, stealing the refuse from other peoples' tables to keep sufficient life in my body to creep hither. This old coat saved me as I came here. In the darkness I picked it up in the country, and it covered my prison clothes. A week back I came across a fragment of a New York paper, and in it read: 'Colonel Andre or friends: The treasure is in our agent's hands, the astrologer, Grog Lane.' I inquired for you and came hither. Am I welcome?"

"Ent!"

It was the only reply of the astrologer as the servant entered the room and placed on the table a salver containing a meal consisting of the choicest viands.

The convict drew up to the table and with no apologies fastened his eyes on the food. He ate unsparingly, like a half-famished man, and when he had concluded the meal turned to the astrologer with a new vitality in his eyes, a new strength in his every gesture.

"Have you come to claim the treasure? Have you brought proofs of your identity?" inquired the astrologer, as his visitor finished the request.

"No; I have not come for that. I have come to ask you to let me rest here for a few days, and then I will not only prove to you my identity, but will repay you for your kindness to me."

"There has already been an application in behalf of your daughter, if Portia Andre is, as you claim, your child."

A gleam of surprise and joy came into the convict's eyes.

"Then No. 93 has been true to his trust."

"No. 93!" repeated the astrologer, in a puzzled tone of voice. "Who is that?"

In a few brief words the colonel detailed his experience with Cecil Vivian, and related his entire story to the astrologer.

"I am convinced from what you say," said the astrologer, when Colonel Andre had completed his narrative, "that you are he whom you profess to be. I will anon tell you a story of your friends, the Brethren of

the Blood, but he whom you call No. 93, and who was none other than Cecil Vivian, the defaulter of the Golconda Gold-Mining Company of Alameda, California, is dead."

"Dead!" repeated the colonel, with a start of surprise and regret.

"Yes; he was found dead in a pit the morning after the escape, shot through the head, it was supposed, by the guard. The man who answered the advertisement is named Gould Dayton, president of the Golconda Gold-Mining Company."

"Dayton, Dayton!" repeated the colonel, abstractedly. "I never knew any one by that name."

"Nevertheless, this man came here with the information that he knew of the existence of the daughter of Colonel Andre, Portia Andre. This is all I know, except that he comes here to-morrow and brings her with him to claim the treasure which I, as agent of the Brethren of the Blood, hold in trust for her."

"My daughter!" cried the colonel, in an agony of ecstatic surprise and joy. "Oh! Providence is kind and she still lives!"

"I know not," replied the astrologer. "As you know, there are enemies to our order whom we cannot trust. Plots against us we must ever be wary of. This treasure is enormous, and as a testimonial of the gratitude of the order for your discovery and return of the diamond, has been made a princely dower. We have, therefore, since this man Dayton came to us, followed him and had him watched, and in this pursuit some strange developments have been ascertained regarding this Cecil Vivian, one Arnold Dacre, and others. It is a strange mystery in which all the parties are concerned, and when we have unraveled the schemes they seem all a party to, we will inform you of everything. As it is, Colonel Andre, rest. I will see that you are furnished with a suit of clothes, and to-morrow you will have an opportunity to ascertain if the woman to be presented by this man Dayton is your daughter or some impostor."

"But how can I tell?" inquired Andre. "They say the natural instincts guide the mother to her child. But as for me, I have not seen my child for fifteen years; and think of the changes that these years may have wrought in her."

"There is one infallible proof," said the astrologer, "one irrefragable proof—the secret symbols of the order of the Brethren of the Blood upon her arm."

"You are right."

Here the interview terminated, the colonel soon retiring to rest, the astrologer still busily engaged in perusing the ancient volume on the table before him.

An hour or more went by, when there came a loud knock at the door below. The servant was again summoned at the tap of the bell at the astrologer's hand; the door below was opened, and soon after there entered a man, travel-worn and evidently exhausted.

He was a tall, dark-skinned man, and seemed upon familiar terms with the astrologer.

"I have succeeded in something tangible this time," he said, as he drew from under his cloak a little oblong tin box. "Whatever the plottings of this man Dayton may be, there are many mixed up in it. At every turn I find myself at fault."

"Did he go to Gratiot last night?" inquired the astrologer.

"He did."

"And you followed him thither?"

"No—I preceded him. I knew his destination, and I anticipated his arrival there by several hours. I watched the parties who seemed to be involved in this plot, if plot it be, and managed to get this box. Whom it concerns, what it refers to, I know not. I only know that it bears sufficiently important relation to some of the characters in whom we are interested to be the subject of considerable care and attention on the part of a woman, and to be stolen from her by a man, the valet of this Arnold Dacre."

The astrologer took up the box and placed it in a drawer by his side, having first regarded its exterior curiously.

Then he resumed his labor at the books before him, reading and making notes with a pen on the margin and in the body of the page.

At last, his labor being seemingly finished, he lay back in his chair as the man retired from the apartment and mused abstractedly.

"The affair is reaching its culmination," he said slowly and aloud, "and another day will develop the truth of this man Dayton's statement to the effect that he is cognizant

of the whereabouts of the daughter of Colonel Andre, and can produce her at any moment. Let me once more look over the case and see that there is no chance left to deceive me or lead me to commit an error in the disposition of the trust left for execution in my hands by the order of the Brethren of the Blood."

The page before him was closely written and covered with marginal notes, and was as follows:

"Hazri, astrologer of the city of New York, a true and faithful agent of the mystic order of the Brethren of the Blood, placed there by the sanction and command of the society to aid its wandering members, to befriend its allies, to watch its enemies, to follow its mandates, is placed in charge of a trust for the daughter of Colonel Andre, Portia Andre, in consideration of the immense benefits conferred on this order by the said Andre. Said trust is a reward for the action of said Andre, and is contained in a casket in the hands of the said agent."

"This casket is to be delivered to Portia Andre only. The agent is to exert all due diligence in ascertaining the whereabouts of the said Portia Andre, and to avoid all deception, as the order has enemies, as these secret may have become patent to some scheming, mercenary plotter. In order to accomplish the true ends of this mandate the said Hazri, astrologer, is to see that upon the right arm of the said Portia Andre is imprinted the mystic symbols of this order, distinctly indelible. The test will prevent any deception as to these signs."

"In accordance with the above, advertisements have been inserted in all the New York papers calling for information in regard to Colonel Andre or his daughter."

"A man bearing the name of Gould Dayton appears with professed knowledge of the existence of Portia Andre."

"This man is watched, and a day set for him to bring forward the maiden and prove her claims to the treasure."

"A plot being suspected, he and a woman called Mabel Clare, one called Mrs. Dana, and two men, Arnold Dacre and his valet, Jean Draschels, are placed under surveillance."

"Plots within a plot of these individuals seem apparent."

"Colonel Andre himself appears. Our spy springs a mysterious package and reports singular events."

"If the man named Cecil Vivian was a friend to Colonel Andre, our duty is to fathom the mystery surrounding these men and understand more fully and plot more deeply."

Here the record terminated. The astrologer closed the book and soon after left the apartment.

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE LION'S DEN.

Little conscious of the plot against her liberty by her husband, Ethel Dayton had risen early on the morning following her interview with him and had sent the servant to the village to execute several small commissions incidental to the household management. She did not know that still, despite the pouring rain and tempestuous weather, two men were hidden in the shrubbery near at hand, watching for this very event to transpire, while a short distance down the road, by the wayside was a close carriage, the driver upon the box ready to move quickly forward at a given signal from Gould Dayton and his confederate, William Bowler.

She was startled from a deep reverie into which she had fallen a few minutes after the departure of Mrs. Thorne by a ring at the door-bell, and arising she went thither and opened the door. As she did so a form quickly shot past her, followed by a second, and the door was violently closed, while she felt herself firmly held in the grasp of Gould Dayton.

"Unhand me, sir!" she cried, as she struggled in the iron grasp of her husband.

"What does this mean?"

"You'll find out soon, my lady," replied Dayton, viciously. "Go ahead, Bill, get her shawl and hat and signal the carriage. Now, then," to Ethel, "one word and one more struggle and I will make no bones of gagging you. Since you've roused the devil in me you shall see its operations to the fullest extent."

A feeling of sickness at heart came over her as she realized how impotent would be her cries and struggles. She donned the

shawl and hat, and as the man Bowler left the house, and going to the gate whistled peculiarly three times, said in a tone of voice trembling and agitated:

"Mau! devil!" she cried, her passion overcoming her prudence, "you may imprison me as you choose—you dare not murder me—and when I regain my freedom I will follow you to the grave and expose your crimes!"

Seeing how impossible it was for her to use force in opposition to these brutes, she quietly entered the carriage, and after a long ride they stopped in front of a gloomy-looking house and were received by an old hag, who opened the door and led the way to a room on the second floor, plainly furnished and with a fire burning in the grate. Then they left her.

Ethel heard them lock the door and bolt it, heard their retiring footsteps down the stairs, and going to the barred windows saw the mau enter the carriage and be driven away.

She realized that she needed all her wits to aid her in opposing the influence and evil designs of the man to whom she had been married.

CHAPTER XXI.

BALKED.

Cecil Vivian looked out upon the dreary landscape from his chamber that morning with varied emotions.

Forevermore shut out from any future intercourse with Ethel Dayton by reason of his assumed identity as Arnold Dacre, forever debarred from approaching the woman he loved by her marriage to Gould Dayton, he experienced the pangs of a very demon of unrest as he realized how impotent was he to aid her, for he knew that she hated and dreaded her husband even as she did the real Arnold Dacre.

He was powerless to assist her, debarred from approaching her by her own act of dismissal, and he could only chafe like a caged lion as he realized his position.

New circumstances demanded his attention that day.

Early in the morning he saw Gould Dayton come to the villa, and he held a long interview with Miss Clare in the library.

He was somewhat surprised an hour later to find Mabel awaiting the arrival of the carriage which was to convey her to the depot at Gratiot. She was dressed as for a journey.

"Are you going away?" he questioned, in amazement.

"Yes; to New York."

"Alone?"

"Yes. I have business with Mr. Dayton in New York. He left on the last train."

The young man reflected for a minute. Perhaps this was a mission bearing reference to the treasure of the Brethren of the Blood. His determination was at once taken; he could not afford to lose this opportunity to ascertain the real object of the journey.

"I will accompany you also," he said.

She demurred.

"Mr. Dayton would not like it," she said. "He was particularly cross and evil-disposed toward you this morning."

"I will at least see you as far as the city. I have business in New York," he said, and thus managed to occupy a seat with her in the carriage to the depot, and thence to the city.

He did not draw her out.

She was close-mouthed upon the subject of her business. That, she affirmed, was a confidential affair which she dared not divulge even to him, and she smiled him a pleasant good-by as the carriage conveyed her away to Gould Dayton's office and left the young man standing alone ruminating perplexedly over the course events had taken.

What should he do? He was sworn to Colonel Andre to protect the interests of his daughter, and yet here perhaps on the very threshold of the undertaking he was powerless to act.

His resolve was soon taken to keep the pair in sight that day.

Going to a coachman with a close vehicle near at hand he placed a ten-dollar gold piece in his hand.

"Are you quick-witted and sharp-sighted, my man?" he asked.

"This takes the cobwebs out of my eyes, sir," he said, significantly.

"I'll make it double if you do my work well to-day. Do you see that carriage turning the corner yonder?"

"I does, governor."

"Keep it in sight till I give the word to stop the chase. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, governor."

Cecil entered the carriage and drew down the blinds.

The vehicle started, and from the corner of the curtained window he watched the one carrying Mabel Clare.

It drove first to the building occupied by the Golconda Gold-Mining Company, where Gould Dayton's offices were located. It was the first time Cecil had seen the building since his arrest, and he gazed upon it with varied emotions.

Miss Clare alighted and entered the private office of the president.

Dayton received her indifferently, and motioned her to a seat without stopping at his work of signing some papers before him. Finally he laid down his pen and looked up.

"It is nearly time for our engagement," he said, consulting his jeweled chronometer.

"Are you prepared for it?"

"I am schooled perfectly," she replied, emphatically.

"Let there be no failure, Mabel. Remember the lesson I have taught you—perfect ignorance of your early life. The mark on your arm is your only proof of identity. My story will tell the rest. And your share of the plunder—plainly, you are thinking of that?"

"Yes."

"It will be forthcoming."

"At once?"

"At once—certainly."

"Que-half, you said."

"Yes."

"Then let us go. I am anxious to terminate the affair; thinking of it makes me nervous."

He led her from the office and out to the carriage as he spoke, not noticing the vehicle standing opposite the building, which started at a short distance from the one occupied by himself and Miss Clare and followed it closely.

"This business ends our communication with each other, Mabel," he said. "If I have been harsh at times with you, or severe against Arnold Dacre, do not blame me. I would not willingly gain your enmity. I ask a continuation of your friendship as heretofore."

She regarded him with a look of singular interest.

"I wish our connection to end here," she said. "I am tired of fighting against evil, and yet not resisting it successfully. If this money you expect had one stain of dishonor or blood with it I would not touch a penny of it. I would withdraw from the scheme at once."

Dayton's eyes gleamed evilly as he looked at her.

She little knew the possibility of evil in this man's nature. She was not yet out of his power.

They rode on in silence for some time, the vehicle—to the driver of which Dayton had given his orders before starting from the office—turning into a dirty, narrow thoroughfare.

Rather a dilapidated quarter for the secretion of a million. I believe you said a million, Mr. Dayton?" she said, with ironical sarcasm.

"Yes."

"And what may be the name of this aristocratic quarter?" she pursued.

"Grog Lane."

"The fairy princess of the romance gropes in dirty waters for her pearls," said Miss Clare, jestingly.

"Gold is gold, and bears the same value, whether covered with the butcher's grease or the patchouli of the aristocrat," replied Dayton; "whether gained by piracy or hard-fisted labor."

"Do you think so?" queried Mabel, regarding Dayton with an expressive glance. "Gold dishonestly accrued takes ready wings."

The man's only reply was a contemptuous sneer at her moral homily, followed by the words:

"We are there."

"Here?" muttered Miss Clare, in surprise, as the carriage stopped before the dilapidated building, in the upper portion of which the astrologer resided. "Is this the place?"

"Yes."

He assisted her to alight and knocked loudly at the door, looking uneasily around at the gaping crowd of urchins who thronged the lane at the unusual sight of such grandeur as a coach and a well-dressed gentleman and lady in those quarters.

The servitor met them at the door and

bowed low to Dayton, whom he recognized as a former visitor.

"Hazri?" said Dayton, in an anxious tone. "He is alone," said the servitor.

Dayton led his companion up the narrow, crooked stair-way, and preceded by the servitor, who ushered them into the reception-room of the astrologer.

The gaze of the woman expressed an agreeable surprise as her eyes fell upon the rich carpet and tapestried arras, and if the furniture of the room was plain, its choice indicated taste and refinement on the part of the owner.

The astrologer entered the apartment a few minutes after their arrival. He bowed with a dignified manner to the visitors, seated himself at the table, and opening the ponderous book which lay upon it, said as he fixed his eyes upon the wondering Miss Clare:

"This is the young lady to whom you referred, I believe, sir?"

"This is Miss Portia Andre," replied Dayton.

"Foregoing the proofs for the present moment, Mr. Dayton," continued the astrologer in a quiet tone of voice, "let me say that these proofs must be positive and beyond a doubt. The trust which it devolves upon me to execute is a most important and sacred one, and my fidelity to the interests of the mystic order of the Brethren of the Blood demand a careful consideration of all intermediate points between the bare assumption on your part that this young lady is Portia Andre and no other, and the proof of that assertion. Your name, young lady, is—"

"Mabel Clare."

"You mean that is the name you are at present known by?"

She bowed assentingly.

"Are you aware of any facts and have any proof thereof which would indicate your early childhood?"

"None."

"You remember nothing of your early life?"

"Absolutely nothing, sir," she replied, steadily, never quivering under the calm, searching gaze he bent upon her. "I was found, I am told, wandering the streets of New York, a mere child, by an old woman, now dead. My life since has been spent in working in a factory and staying in an old tenement-house, friendless and alone."

"Then, Mr. Dayton," the astrologer said, "my conversation must be with you. How long have you known Miss Clare—or rather Miss Andre, her proper name, should she prove to be the person you assert her to be?"

"Five years."

"Please detail the circumstances of your acquaintance with her."

"I will, sir," briefly replied Dayton, with a brisk, business-like air, confident of his ability to prove satisfactorily the claim of his accomplice to the treasure which they had plotted for. "I had charge of a tenement-house where this young woman resided. I came across her, sick and poor, while collecting rents. Accidentally I observed the mysterious marks upon her arm. I thought nothing of their import at the time. Pitying her forlorn condition I offered her a position as governess, or rather companion, to a friend's children. In looking over her effects left in my charge one day I came across a ring. This is it. She had never seen it before. It was wrapped up in a piece of paper, in a pocket of a dirty and ragged child's apron, which she said had lain in a box containing her other personal effects for years."

He handed a ring to the astrologer as he spoke, a plain gold ring, a child's bauble, containing inside the words, "Portia Andre."

"I saw your advertisement," continued Dayton, "and came to see you. That is all. Upon her arm are the singular signs to which you once alluded."

"Let me see them."

Miss Clare, without any more ado, flung back her black water-proof cloak and unbuttoned her cuff.

She raised her sleeve above the elbow. Upon the fair white arm were the dark, distinct signs.

The astrologer's eyes were bent closely over the uncovered arm. His manner indicated his belief that she was in reality Portia Andre.

"Are you satisfied?" inquired Dayton, eagerly, as the astrologer continued to regard the mysterious symbols.

"Partly; but I must commit no error in this business."

The servitor entered from the outer room.

"Bring me the test-lotion," he said.

The servitor returned in a few minutes from the adjoining apartment with a salver upon which was a little silver dish containing a curiously tinted, purplish liquid, by the side of which was a damp sponge.

"The marks of our order may be counterfeited," said the astrologer slowly, "but the ink used in making those marks—never. If these are not genuine they will disappear; if they are they will remain."

The young lady held out her arm at a sign from the astrologer. She knew not what the result might be.

Breathlessly the three saw the purplish decoction work slowly around the marks, saw the sponge dipped and applied again and again, smoothly brushing off the lotion.

The marks had disappeared.

Gould Dayton had started back with an oath, expressing his disappointment and chagrin.

Mabel Clare, the same calm, stately being under all circumstances, smiled contemptuously at his poorly laid and easily detected plot, and coolly buttoned her sleeve, while the astrologer, rising to his feet and turning his flashing eyes upon the two conspirators, uttered the single word:

"Fraud!"

At that moment the arras was disturbed slightly and a human face peered forth, unseen by the trio. A pale, startled face fixed its eyes upon the crest-fallen Dayton, and then turned attentively to the features of the astrologer, who said:

"Your plot has failed. I have suspected you from the first. I am certain of your villainy now. There could be but one man who had the courage sufficient to attempt this deception upon us, but one man sufficiently initiated into the mysteries and symbols of our order to thus be familiar with it and attempt this imposition upon us, and that man is—"

The arras moved aside, and Colonel Andre stepping forward confronted the guilty conspirators, and fixing his eyes upon the horrified and startled Gould Dayton, uttered the single word:

"Marston!"

CHAPTER XXII.

UNMASKED.

Confronted by the person whom he had so wronged, brought face to face with the man whom he had hated most on earth, in view of the fact that he had believed him to be dead and forever out of his way, Gould Dayton stood absolutely petrified. He staggered to a seat and sunk into it mechanically, and sat speechless; his eyes fixed upon the avenging wraith of Colonel Andre.

"Marston!" repeated the astrologer, in a tone of startled surprise, "is this man Marston?"

"This wretch, this fiend, whose crimes are as numerous as the sands of the sea, whose low, evil nature knows nothing of honor or right or good, is he," said Andre, regarding the abject creature with a look in which anger and contempt mingled. "Shall I crush him where he is? Shall I avenge my wrongs and those of others at this moment, and rid the world of a fiend in human shape? Man, devil, as you care for your life, as you hope to leave this room alive, answer me truly. Where is my daughter?"

"I know not."

Fear wrung the words from the lips of the craven—the rage and fierceness of the other forced the denial from Gould Dayton.

"Do you mean to say you do not know where my daughter is?" demanded the colonel, sublime in his anger, approaching the man with threatening gestures. "Do you mean to say you did not steal my child from me when you sent me to rot and die in that horrid prison? Answer me truly, for I will bear no trifling, I warn you."

"I do not know. I did not—"

"Listen to me, Marston," continued the colonel, cooling down somewhat, as he seemed to believe the man's denial of the accusation of kidnapping his daughter. "You have taunted me when powerless with this; if it be so, you are not free from my vengeance when you leave this room. My hatred shall follow you. My watchful eyes shall search out the falseness or truth of what you say, and if you have lied to me, beware, for I will tear your false, craven heart from your bosom and torture you till you die."

"Bold words, these," returned Dayton, as, noting that he was in no immediate danger of the vengeance of the man he had so wronged, his bravado came to his rescue. "An escaped convict, your first appearance

on the street will be the signal for your arrest."

"And the minute Colonel Andre enters a prison at your instigation witnesses your death at the hands of the Brethren of the Blood," spoke the impressive voice of the astrologer.

At that minute, as Gould Dayton turned pale with fear at the significant reference of the astrologer to the order he so dreaded, there came a knock at the door below, and a minute later the servitor ushered Cecil Vivian into the apartment.

"No. 93!" ejaculated the colonel, springing forward. "You here? I thought you dead."

The impostor started, confused, perplexed for a minute.

Then he said calmly:

"You are mistaken, sir. I have not the honor to know you. My business was with yonder young lady, Miss Clare. To watch over her interests, and to prevent any advantage being taken of her, I have followed her hither."

"And who gave you the right to intrude upon my business?" demanded Dayton, furiously.

"My friendship and interest for Miss Clare," responded Cecil, firmly.

"Do you mean to say that you are not the man who pledged me in the prison at Sing Sing?" demanded the colonel, as he regarded Cecil with a searching look.

"Some fancied resemblance I bear to your friend must have deceived you," replied Cecil, steadily. "My name is Arnold Daere."

"Then," demanded the colonel, holding to the hand of the young man, "where did you obtain that ring?"

Fatal circle! the ring which had been given by the convict to his comrade in escape from the prison had betrayed its owner.

"You are not Arnold Daere," spoke the voice of the astrologer, "for Arnold Daere is dead. If you are actuated by any fear at this minute of yonder man," pointing to Dayton, "dismiss that fear. He dare not injure you, for his head is already too near the halter to dare to expose you or Colonel Andre."

Mabel Clare had grown steadily paler as the terrible supposition that her real lover was dead, and that she had been made the dupe of an impostor, flashed over her mind. Gould Dayton, stupefied, confused, wondering, was silent, and arose to his feet.

"Come," he said, turning to Mabel Clare, "we will leave here."

She repelled his outstretched hand, and said with a quiet dignity:

"No; here our compact ends. Henceforth our paths diverge."

"Beware!" he hissed, his eyes gleaming dangerously. "I have been balked for the present, but my time will come."

"Then, go alone. I fear you not."

The craven turned, without a look at the occupants of the room. His brain was in a whirl of rage, chagrin and amazement. The servitor followed, and locked the door after him as he left the room.

"I am going," said Mabel Clare finally, drying her tears and starting to her feet. "I am going to seek revenge."

"Revenge," repeated Colonel Andre, in surprise, "for what, of whom?"

"Of Gould Dayton, for the murder of Arnold Daere!" she cried, in a passionate tone of voice, foreign to her nature. "The mystery of that night is clear to me now. Arnold Daere was killed, and Gould Dayton was his murderer."

She went from the apartment as she spoke, leaving the men together, each wondering at the singular turn affairs had taken on that eventful day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NEARING THE END.

At last the mystery surrounding the case of Cecil Vivian was in a fair way to be cleared away, and yet he hesitated to avow openly what was known to the astrologer, Colonel Andre, Mabel Clare, and Gould Dayton.

The least surmise on the part of the prison authorities as to his whereabouts and that of his companion, the least intimation that they were in existence, would place them back in captivity and send them again where their power to act would be limited and ineffectual.

They had nothing, they reasoned, to fear, except from Gould Dayton, and Colonel Andre expressed his regret at allowing the man to escape, thus giving him an opportunity

to place the detectives on their track; but the astrologer's face wore a peculiar smile as he told them to have no fear on that score, that before night, in addition to the warnings he had already received, Gould Dayton would be told decisively of the immediate fate awaiting him should he utter one word concerning these men whose liberty was in his hand.

As to Mabel Clare, they feared nothing. In their inmost heart they felt a keen sympathy for the woman, and Colonel Andre expressed a lively interest in her future welfare.

He knew that she would bring her lover's murderer—if assassinated he had surely been—to the gallows, if it took a life-time to consummate it.

"What shall we do—how shall we move?" was the query of the two-escaped prisoners, and Hazri, the astrologer, answered them slowly.

For the colonel, he bade him remain with him for a month at least, in the meantime exerting all due vigilance in advertising for his lost daughter.

As to Vivian, he bade him retain the identity he had assumed for the present and go boldly about. He need not fear; nor yet be hasty, but slowly work to the necessary point.

The evidence of the spies of the Brethren of the Blood would soon disentangle all the mystery of the stock and complete the proofs of Gould Dayton's villainy and perjury.

Cecil Vivian boldly entered the world again, and his first move was to go to Gratiot.

He would have evaded it if he could.

He found Gervaise Villa still tenanted by Miss Clare, but when she came down to the drawing-room that evening he scarcely recognized her.

She had abandoned all the jewelry whose elegance and richness had combined to produce so dazzling an effect with her peerless beauty.

She had dressed her hair simply, had assumed a plain black dress, and while looking far lovelier in the rare simplicity of her attire, her pale cheeks told a story of recent suffering difficult for her to conceal.

"I am going away to-night," she said to him, when she met him, "and we may not meet again for some time, Mr. Vivian."

"You are going to leave here?" he said in some surprise. "Have you any definite object in view?"

"Yes, I have laid my plans for the future."

"Can I be of any assistance to you, Miss Clare?" he asked, respectfully.

"No, thank you. The money I have will be all I shall need. We have both suffered terribly through this man, Gould Dayton, and if I ever need a friend I shall call upon you."

"You can depend upon my assistance," he replied, warmly.

Thus they parted, she leaving her place to carry out her scheme of vengeance; he, the following morning, unable to overcome the fascination which led him thither, going to the little white cottage on the outskirts of the village.

He would go there now; he would see Mrs. Dane once more, at least. He would tell her all.

Why should he avoid telling her his sad, eventful story, which the others knew? Had he not been there that evening when Gould Dayton had taken refuge in the porch from the storm, she might have passed in undiscovered and he have gone away without being cognizant of her identity and whereabouts.

She was now in the hands of the villain, and his wife or not, he would reveal himself to her and let her know that she had at least one true friend to rely on.

A ring at the door-bell brought the old servant, Mrs. Thorne, to the door.

"Mrs. Dane?" he asked, noticing the perturbation of manner on the part of the nurse.

"Gone, sir."

"Gone!" he repeated. "Where?"

"I do not know, sir. It's a mystery to me. The night ye were not here, the man came and went—her husband, I tak it. The next mornin', when I came fra the village, where I had gone marketin', she war no whar to be found."

Cecil left the cottage with a heavy heart. He made diligent inquiry in the village, but found not the slightest clew which might lead to the discovery of the fate of the woman.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TWO BREAKS FOR LIBERTY.

Evening in the vast institution devoted to the taming of human beasts of prey transformed into beasts of burden. Burdens of the day, physically carried, laid down for the adoption of far more wearing burdens of thought.

When Tom Jones, convict No. 47, had been returned to Sling Sing, which tames and sends its patients away with moral crutches and slings, and had been lashed and starved and shower-bathed till nearly dead, he was removed to the dungeon cell, a cell in which the most incorrigible and insubordinate prisoners were confined.

It was unlike the other cells in but two respects. It was near the corridor guard, to prevent escape unseen from the inside, and had steel bars at the window; and yet, when they turned the key of the dangerous cell upon old No. 47, new No. 195, for the first time, he smiled grimly, went through a pantomime battle with his brawny fists, and felt of his immense muscles gloatingly.

"I won't stay here long," he said, and he kept his word.

Even if he had not been watched closely, it is doubtful if he would have availed himself of the tools on his work-bench to aid his escape.

He had other ideas in his mind, and in every difficult and heavy labor he took an active and foremost part, indulging his wiry, thick-knit sinews to their fullest capacity, and exerting his muscles until they bulged out like an ox's limbs.

He was training for the battle, he was preparing for the grand coup of his life, he was going to "break jail."

One night he placed his strong, brawny fists on the smooth and polished steel bars with herculean strength.

They gave, bent, and came back straight as arrows, irresistible as ever.

He repeated the operation hour by hour, night by night, until one night he heard an ominous snap, away back in the thick stone walls.

He smiled grimly, triumphantly. He had broken the iron anchor holding the steel bars in their places.

Move one. Inventive genius and brute force had made one gigantic stride toward liberty.

The ensuing night he made a second discovery.

As constant dropping of water wears away stone, so constant tension had weakened the steel bars, and had worn the hole in the masonry into which the ends penetrated beyond their original size.

He worked these bars only sufficiently to get through, and one dark, tempestuous night he gathered all his brute strength for the final effort.

He began operations by turning the bars until the resisting force was from the outside, and pushed against them with all his might.

Afterward, the outside guard remembered of dimly seeing a glittering object shoot downward, accompanied by an unusual noise.

He paid but little attention to it, however, little dreaming that convict No. 195, old No. 47, had pushed the champion steel bars from their sockets—had opened a way to freedom.

The next morning Tom Jones was free. To the consternation of the officers of the jail his cell was found empty!

Singular coincidence! That same evening, which found the cold, wet, dripping giant, Tom Jones, a free man once more, witnessed poor, tortured Ethel Dayton striving likewise for her liberty with a determined will, with a desperate resolve.

From the day she had entered the old house by the sea-side she had seen no one, had conversed with no one, except the old woman who brought her her meals and attended to her apartment.

Upon this especial night she dismissed her, as was usual, and waited until perfect quiet about the house indicated that she had retired for the night. Then she approached the window.

The sash, as she knew, was nailed down, from previous efforts to move it. As a wild gust of wind swept by the building, she struck one of the large panes of glass with her hand, which was bound up in a wet towel, and the crashing of the glass was lost in the tumult of the tempest without.

The shutters were secured with a chain, which held them so close together that they only went a few inches apart.

The slats were strong and were well made, and she knew that only a strong blow would break them.

She took up the poker from the fire-place, pried at the lower hinge of one of the shutters, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing it swing loose from the building on the strong winds of the storm.

Directly below the window was the arched roof of the vestibule, and thence to the ground it was quite a distance.

She hurried on a shawl and cloak, and then stepping on a chair, climbed through the window and squeezed through the aperture between the loose shutters and the window-sill.

Dizzy-headed, and blinded by her exploit, she slid over to the smooth tin roof of the vestibule to which she had fallen, and clung to the eaves in a trembling terror.

In the uncertain light, as she clung there, she knew not the distance to the ground, but she realized that sooner or later she must release her final hold.

Already her fingers were cramped and strained, and uttering a silent prayer to heaven for aid in her dire extremity, she closed her eyes and dropped to the ground. She stumbled and fell, arose to her feet, and then turning toward the direction of the lake, hastened to the beach.

She found the shingly sands far less tiresome than the muddy roads, and she hurried on, untroubled by the dashing of the waves or the wild sounds of the storm.

Blindly on she staggered, mile after mile, hour after hour, falling, stumbling, but bravely struggling to place many miles between herself and her recent jailers, and finally, just as the first dim tracings of early morning appeared in the eastern sky, she gained a little evergreen forest near the water and rested.

The storm had ceased, but the sky was sultry and threatening, the air heavy and foggy, the earth damp and muddy.

She sat down under a tree and rested, cold, chilled, and hungry. Where was she? How near to Gratiot? Should she go there at all?

Alas! her little place at Gratiot could no longer be the safe and comfortable place of concealment it had once been; but she had left a large amount of jewelry and money in her bureau drawer there, and she wished to secure it to reimburse Mrs. Thorne for her services, and to make some arrangement with her agent to dispose of the furniture, and then—

Then what?

Wandering, hiding, in perpetual fear of her husband. What a life! What a cruel existence had fate awarded the petted child of wealth and society.

She finally reached the depot unobserved. It was a lonely, dilapidated building, and as a train stopped for a minute she hurried aboard.

She kept her veil closely down over her face, and paid her fare to Gratiot, without attracting more than ordinary attention from the conductor and the few passengers in the coach.

Between Gratiot and the station directly north of it was a little way-place called Junction Station. It was two miles from Gratiot, and she determined to encounter no risks, but got off at the out-of-the-way place, hastening along the railroad track immediately after the train had gone. She feared meeting some one she knew at Gratiot—of being recognized or apprehended by her husband—little dreaming of the eventful scenes which had transpired at her former place of residence since her departure.

She walked along the track, slowly nearing the town, weary, her garments soaked with the pouring rain, her face cold, and her frame chilled with the cutting night wind.

At last she reached the far limits of the village. Between that, unless she went by the regular thoroughfare, which she was desirous of avoiding, in order to escape recognition and possible detention, was a series of pits, some filled with water, some empty, all more or less deep and dangerous, a wild, bleak, barren stretch of territory.

Could she but safely pass this section, she could gain the rear of the cottage and enter unperceived.

If the house was guarded, or if Gould Dayton had heard of her escape from the lone house on the shore, and was consequently on the alert for her return, he could readily ascertain that fact from a survey of the premises before entering, and then determine her future conduct. Doubtless her husband had heard of her escape. She must in every way evade recapture.

She stumbled and fell a score of times. Her delicate hands were scratched and bleeding from contact with the rough rocks, her dress bedraggled, torn and muddy; and a sigh of relief arose to her lips as she emerged upon a little road leading from the village past her house to Gervaise Villa. She must cross this road and gain the woods to reach her proposed place of destination.

At that minute a man came down the road from the direction of Gervaise Villa at a rapid rate of speed. He stopped, looked at her, and then uttered the single word:

"Ethel!"

She turned with a cry of terror and alarm. It was Cecil Vivian, Arnold Dacre as she believed him to be, and as she saw several other forms hastening to the place, she turned and fled.

Back over the rough path she had come, wildly, recklessly, heedless of rocks and brush and pits, for she had recognized in one of the approaching men, more by form than feature, in the imperfect light of the stormy evening, her husband, Gould Dayton.

A stumble, a fall, a loud cry for help, a form springing up from some dim covert, and then, as she fell downward into the water of the pit, she lost consciousness; not, however, until her quick hearing had caught the agonized cry of Cecil Vivian:

"Ethel! Ethel!"

CHAPTER XXV.

"FOR WILLFUL MURDER."

While Cecil Vivian had remained at Gervaise Villa, waiting almost hopelessly for some clue to develop itself which might lead to the discovery of Ethel Dayton, his cousin was in New York, full of impotent anger, and afraid to move in the affair which engrossed his attention and time—the rearest of Cecil.

The way was opened at last for his revenge. An evil destiny presented an opportunity to forever place his hated rival out of the power of injuring him.

Jean Darschels, the former valet of Arnold Dacre, came to Dayton's office in New York City.

The change in the man's personal appearance somewhat startled him. The light, curly hair was gone, the mustache had disappeared, and a smooth-faced, sharp-eyed little man stood before him, with none of the smiling servility of the valet, and fully as little of the assumed Frenchified nonsense of Monsieur Jean Darschels.

"Jean!" uttered Dayton, as he arose and led the man into his private room.

"We are alone?" he inquired, as Dayton resumed his seat.

"Quite alone."

"And out of ear-shot of any eavesdropper?"

"Entirely so."

"Good. Point one. I am not Jean Darschels. I am—"

The man threw back the lapel of his coat as he spoke. His *vis-à-vis* started as he saw a silver badge bearing the inscription:

TAYLOR BAINBRIDGE,

Detective,

United States Secret Service.

"Point two," continued the detective, briskly, business-like, giving his companion no time to put in a word. "You knew Arnold Dacre?"

"Yes."

"Good again. Point three. You know Mr. Cecil Vivian?"

"Yes."

"Good again. Point four. Mr. Arnold Dacre was murdered. Mr. Cecil Vivian lives, and is an escaped convict."

Was the suddenness of the detective intentional and assumed for effect, or was he sure of his game, certain of his prey, and only curt and concise from professional habit? Evidently the latter, for though his sharp, restless eyes never wandered from the face of Gould Dayton, its growing paleness neither startled nor surprised him.

"Four points. Do you agree with me in all?"

"Then all."

"Then all I have got to say is between you and I, we know, you know, who murdered Arnold Dacre."

He knew? Ah! only too well. Self-accused, spell-bound by the impressive manner of the detective, he grew white as the marble mantel-piece behind him, and never uttered a word.

"Yes, we know," resumed the detective.

"In fact, I can say that I can place my hand

on the shoulder of the man who murdered Arnold Dacre as easily as I now place my hand on your shoulder."

He had been drawing nearer to his companion as he spoke, bringing his chair nearer and nearer Gould Dayton as he drew nearer and nearer the culminating point in his revelation.

He had placed his hand on the shoulder of his *vis-a-vis*, who, white, trembling, cowering, sat gazing at him, horror-struck and speechless.

Had his crime found him out? Was he tracked at the first, suspected at the outset of the exposition of the mystery surrounding the strange disappearance of Arnold Dacre?

Was it a plot of Cecil Vivian? No. Plainly and distinctly, the last words of the man-hunter rang out, clear and impressive, nailing all his fears, reassuring his cowardly heart, threatening ruin to his enemy with the cruelty of revenge, causing a revulsion of feeling which brought a fierce, intense joy.

"Day by day, hour by hour, have I been nearing on his track, tracing this thing down to a very fine point. The proofs all in, the evidence all in my hand, the man ready to be taken, the law eager to be vindicated. In fact, I hold in my hand," and he drew an official-looking document from his inner breast-pocket and waved it before the eyes of his companion, "a warrant for the apprehension of Cecil Vivian, otherwise known as State convict No. 93, for the willful murder of Arnold Dacre."

Heaven! what a blinding, rushing of hurried ideas through Gould Dayton's brain at the sudden revelation of this man of the law! What an emotion of relief, joy, hatred, vengeance, at the final declaration! He was free from any participation of the murder in the eyes of the law—not even suspected.

Did he for a minute suspect the man before him? Did he suspect that he was not acting in sincerity? If truth there was, he fell headlong into it. Henceforth this man had his confidence.

"Yes, it was Cecil Vivian," he murmured, mechanically, magnetized at the quick manner of the other, relieved from a terrible tension on his mind by the expression of the untruth.

"You hate this Vivian; you fear him. You have him in your power, and yet you hesitate to injure him. That is now my business," continued the detective. "All I want is the truth. Did you see Arnold Dacre on the night of the murder?"

"I did."

"Did you part from him before you reached the road leading to Gervaise Villa, or afterward?"

"Before."

"Positively?"

"I swear to it."

"You met him pleasantly, in a friendly manner, upon that night?"

"No, we were not friends."

"You are plain."

"I am truthful."

"You had no words with him, no threats passed between you?"

"None; a surprised meeting—he had been abroad—and a cold parting."

"That is all, Mr. Dayton. You are a jewel of a witness. I go to-night to Gratiot to arrest Cecil Vivian. If he can be surprised into a confession, it will save money and time to the state. Will you come?"

"Willingly."

"I will call for you, then, at half-past six. Be here and ready to go without delay."

He left Gould Dayton abruptly as he spoke—left him in a maze of malignant joy, uncertainty and wonder. His revenge had come, the desired fruition of his plans was to be an accomplished fact, and his hand did not deal the blow.

That evening's train from the city bore himself and the detective away. They arrived at Gratiot in the wet, cheerless evening, and immediately went with the sheriff of the county to Gervaise Villa. They were informed that Mr. Dacre had just left for New York City on business; had just gone down the short road to the depot, without waiting for the carriage, lest he should miss the return accommodation train.

They hurried on after him, caught sight of him; and at last, dimly conscious of a female figure darting away in the darkness toward the deserted lime-pits, caught him.

For at that minute when Cecil Vivian had started after the retreating form of the woman he loved, as he heard the splash in the water and the single wild cry of distress,

a hand was laid on his shoulder with a vise-like gripe.

"Let me go!" he cried, struggling wildly to escape. "A woman is in distress."

"Not much, my covey!" cried a voice he recognized.

"Jean, release me at once. Dayton, is this another plot of yours?" he said, as he recognized his cousin.

"No, Mr. Cecil Vivian, it is not," rejoined the detective. "It is my plot, and I, Taylor Bainbridge, detective in the United States Secret Service, arrest you for the willful murder of Arnold Dacre."

He heard the words, but he knew not if it was a plot or reality. His eyes stared at the spot where Ethel Dayton had just disappeared. His ears still rung with that last despairing cry of the woman he loved, and he was helpless to aid her. He cried to Gould Dayton:

"For heaven's sake, man, jump into the water and rescue that woman. She just fell into yonder pit!" and he pointed to a large excavated section of land where the black waters gleamed darkly.

"Who was it? What is it?" asked Dayton, scarcely comprehending his cousin's words, so intent was he upon the capture, so engrossed in believing his struggles to aid the woman in an attempt to escape.

"It is a woman fallen into yonder pit!" cried Cecil. "It was your wife, Ethel Dayton!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

TURNING OF THE TIDE.

The day of the trial of Cecil Vivian, who had remained in prison since his arrest by Bainbridge for the willful murder of Arnold Dacre, at last dawned.

Of all the persons in the court-room, no one was so complacent as Gould Dayton.

He believed that he could send his cousin to prison again, or the gallows, and he did not fear exposure of his past plans. He was self-possessed and calm as he witnessed the pale face of Vivian and believed his escape impossible.

Bainbridge, the detective, was silent and speculative, and professed to have a clear case against the prisoner.

Cecil Vivian was content in his prison cell to abide the issues of the trial, relying upon the astrologer and his friends to resist and disprove the statements against his innocence of the crime alleged.

The case was opened briefly by the prosecution when, after some little difficulty, an unprejudiced jury had been impaneled.

The case was then proceeded with, and the prosecutor for the people called Mr. Bainbridge.

The detective took the stand and motioned his desire to be heard before being sworn. The judge nodded inquiringly.

"Your honor," said Bainbridge, calmly, "I would ask the favor of first relating my story and then being examined by the attorneys."

"Let the witness be sworn," said the judge, "and the ordinary rules of practice be waived, if agreeable to the counsel for the defense."

"The departure from the regular rules will not be objected to by us," replied Vivian's attorney.

Then I will proceed without further ado," continued the detective. "My name is Bainbridge, for ten years in the secret service force of the United States. The present case is entirely foreign to my peculiar line in the profession, and simply an outgrowth of a case I had in hand. Two months ago I met in London, England, Mr. Arnold Dacre, the murdered man. For many years I had been looking for him, but I had abandoned the game, not having been able to spot him. I had no warrant, and the extradition treaty between England and this country rendered forcible arrest impossible. I therefore disguised myself, and palming myself off upon him as Jean Darschels, in search of employment, secured a situation from him as a valet, my knowledge of the French language carrying out my assumption that I was a Parisian."

"The case he was involved in was this:

"When I set sail with him on a steamer for America, my intention was to arrest him for embezzlement immediately upon landing upon home soil. Circumstances changed the determination, for I saw from letters in this man's possession, to which I had access, that he was engaged, or rather had been engaged, in other plots. What those plots were it is not necessary to state. Suffice it to say that they had but little bearing on

this case, and Mr. Dacre's death prevented their culmination.

"I immediately asked leave of absence for a few days from Mr. Dacre upon arriving in New York City, ostensibly to visit friends in Boston, really to watch his maneuvers. I did subsequently go to Boston, and mailed letters thence to his address at New York but upon the afternoon of the day upon which Mr. Dacre was murdered I took the train, disguised, and followed him to Gratiot, whence he had gone to meet his affianced wife, Miss Mabel Clare, at Gervaise Villa.

"It was dark when we reached there, and there was no vehicle at the depot. He started with his satchel in his hand to walk to the villa. I followed him, my watchful movements being unsuspected by him. He met but one man, the witness seated yonder, Mr. Gould Dayton. They spoke and parted. I then returned to the depot, and satisfied that there would be nothing gained by following him to the villa, returned to New York, thence to Boston, on professional business.

"When I returned to New York I found Arnold Dacre at the hotel—Arnold Dacre, as I supposed at first, and as he represented himself to be, but, as I suspected a few days later, an impostor. Your Honor, and gentlemen of the jury, I am now ready to swear that the false Arnold Dacre was the prisoner at the bar. Mr. Cecil Vivian, otherwise known as convict No. 93, escaped from Sing Sing prison, the murderer of Arnold Dacre."

There was an intense interest throughout the court-room at this impressive declaration of the detective, who, waiting for a minute, proceeded in the same methodical, business-like manner and tone of voice:

"When I first suspected some trickery, and saw that, despite the resemblance between this man Vivian, the prisoner at the bar, and dead Mr. Dacre, I began to search for proofs. I have, from that moment until the hour of arrest, searched steadily for clues to the murder. As you are aware, Arnold Dacre was found in the pit near the prison of Sing Sing, with a bullet-wound in his breast, and his face and head crushed and covered with blood.

"That dead body, the corpse of Arnold Dacre, murdered by the prisoner at the bar, was buried as the escaped convict, Cecil Vivian. As to proofs, I have to offer you the suit of clothes, soiled, bloody, and a piece of paper upon which this man Vivian had practiced the real Arnold Dacre's handwriting. This man Vivian had killed Arnold Dacre, flung him into the pit, and then had assumed his identity, believing the marvelous resemblance would lead to the burial of Dacre as the escaped convict No. 93.

"These are all my proofs. Where the pistol came from that did the deed, I know not. My convictions are that murder most foul and cold-blooded has been done, and that the prisoner at the bar, Cecil Vivian, was the murderer."

An impressive pause followed the declaration of the detective, and then he was put through a rigid course of cross-examination. He was followed by Gould Dayton, who detailed his experience of the night of the murder, of his meeting the murdered man and parting with him, and of his general acquaintance with him, and several other unimportant witnesses were examined, and then the case was rested for the prosecution.

In the face of such purely circumstantial evidence there was little upon which to convict the prisoner; yet when Gould Dayton had given in his evidence and left the court-room, he was confident of the conviction of his hated rival and cousin, Cecil Vivian.

Had he remained he would have been surprised, if not absolutely startled, as the defense called its first witness, and a closely veiled woman took the witness-stand; and, lifting aside her veil, revealed the pale, woe-stricken features of Mabel Clare.

To every one in the room, except the astrologer, Hazzi, and the attorneys for the defense, this was a decided sensation. Cecil Vivian had been surprised out of his wonted calm demeanor, and listened eagerly to her evidence. It was simple and short. She had known Gould Dayton. He had been to see her on business upon the evening of the murder. She had told him of the anticipated visit of Arnold Dacre, and he, jealously enraged, had left her with a fierce oath, vowing to get even with the man. This was all she knew, but it created a decided impression favorable to the prisoner.

If the assembled throng had been amazed at the introduction of this unexpected witness in the court-room, absolute wonderment greeted the announcement of the next

witness, and as her name was given by the attorney for the defense, the prisoner started in his seat with a startled cry, for it was Ethel, Gould Dayton's wife!

It was of a verity Ethel, pale, and looking more careworn than when he had seen her last, but still lovely and beloved to the yearning heart of the prisoner at the bar. The judge and jury, attorney and auditors, witnessed the surprise manifested by all concerned in the case by the unexpected appearance of their new witness, and it was some minutes before the woman was sworn.

How came she here? How had she escaped what had seemed to Cecil Vivian as inevitable death? He had believed her dead, and this fact had been supported by the reports brought to him through his friends, that no trace of her had been found; but her plunge into the dark waters of the pit upon the night which saw Cecil Vivian a prisoner, accused of the murder of Arnold Dacre, had not been unperceived.

The escaped convict, Tom Jones, lurking in the solitary confines of the quarry, had witnessed the plunge, drawn her out and saved her life.

Briefly, then, the story of this twain since then had been strict secrecy and hiding, and finally that morning Ethel had gone to Vivian's attorney, and Tom Jones, under a safe disguise, was now in the court-room, watching the course of the trial.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE VINDICATION.

"Your name is Mrs. Ethel Dayton?" was the first query which greeted Ethel as she stood in the witness-stand in the court in which Cecil Vivian was arraigned as a murderer.

"Yes, sir."

She cast a long, tender, pitying look at her lover as she spoke. Since she had known who he was, all her love and faith for him had returned.

"Wife of Mr. Gould Dayton?"

"They call me so."

"Are you not really so?" queried the attorney for the prosecution.

"In law, perhaps I am, but when love is concerned I am no more his wife than he my husband," she replied, with calm dignity.

"Is the nature of your evidence for your husband?" pointedly inquired the lawyer.

"Certainly not," she replied, with freezing dignity. "My husband's interests neither concern nor interest me."

"You are acquainted with the prisoner at the bar?"

"I am."

"As Cecil Vivian?"

"As both Cecil Vivian and Arnold Dacre."

"Knowing them to be totally different persons?"

"No, sir. The remarkable resemblance led me into an error."

"Detail your acquaintance with the facts in this case."

Mrs. Dayton proceeded to relate her acquaintance with Cecil Vivian, her marriage, her discovery of the perfidy of her husband, her flight, and the appearance of Cecil Vivian upon the night of his escape from Sing Sing prison. She told of his sudden appearance, of her hiding him, and of her subsequent experience. How, without fear or favor, she had come to give her evidence now, and how she believed the prisoner at the bar to be innocent of the murder of Arnold Dacre.

If she had hoped that her evidence, unimportant and lacking in some essential particulars, would clear the prisoner, she found herself in error, for notwithstanding she proved that Cecil Vivian had been at her house fully two hours after Arnold Dacre, the detective had sworn, had left the depot, the jury were strongly fixed in their convictions, but as she concluded a ripple of excitement went through the court-room as there entered Gould Dayton, pale and woe-begone.

Yet Cecil Vivian was not free. Officers of the law were ready to arrest him as an escaped convict when he left the court-room, and a new interest was created in the proceedings in court as a white haired, white-bearded man came forward with a mysterious package in his hand and begged permission to speak in open court.

This granted, Hazri, the astrologer—for it was he—commenced his story.

He spoke briefly of Colonel Andre, and turning pointed to that person in one corner of the court-room. He alluded in a few well-chosen words to Tom Jones and then spoke impressively of Cecil Vivian.

"These three men," he said, "have fur-

thered the ends of justice and revealed the true murderer of Arnold Dacre, yet they stand in the position of escaped convicts on unexpired sentences. One word from Gould Dayton, who is here—his confession of the truth—would clear all. As he will not do it we must depend upon other proofs to clear them. Tom Jones, the escaped convict, will, with the permission of the honorable court, relate his story of the plots against Colonel Andre and Cecil Vivian."

A suppressed buzz of excitement went through the room as the miner stepped forward and began his story. Through it all he never wavered, but his perfect indifference to his crimes evinced more of reckless habit than utter moral abandonment. He began his narrative with his following of Colonel Andre with a companion to steal his watch and chain, which they had spotted as rich and easily obtainable booty.

The colonel had shot his comrade in self-defense and then fled.

Gould Dayton and some friend of his then came out of the apartment whence they had forced Colonel Andre forth, and when Dayton saw what had been done to the comrade of Tom Jones he called him aside and offered him a large amount to swear that they were assisting him (Dayton) to expel the colonel—who was threatening violence—from the room when he fired at the man whom Dayton had called upon to assist him. Colonel Andre was sent to prison therefore, innocent of the crime for the supposed commission of which he was adjudged a life-sentence.

As to Cecil Vivian, the ex-convict related all he knew concerning the plots of Gould Dayton and Arnold Dacre against him. Briefly he related the plan to flood the mines, to ship iron-ore instead of gold-dust, and the burning of the steamer, all at the instigation of Arnold Dacre. He then went on to speak of subsequent events and finally related a most singular incident.

He fully confessed his criminality and kept back nothing. So intense was this man's hatred of Gould Dayton, so resolved to track him to earth, that all self-interest disappeared in his eagerness to condemn him. He had spoken of his later knowledge of his error in adjudging Cecil Vivian as Arnold Dacre, and then went on to state that the package of certificates which Cecil Vivian had really signed he had stolen from Arnold Dacre's pocket as he left Gould Dayton's presence the morning of the culmination of the arrest. These he had hidden near New York before arrest. Being afraid to negotiate, he returned them for fear of detection of his crime. When he first escaped from prison he had secured these and hidden them near Gervaise Villa with Arnold Dacre's papers.

The subsequent fate of these papers he did not know, only that he had directed Ethel Dayton thither and they had been stolen from her by the pretended valet, who in turn lost them, as has been seen.

Cecil Vivian then plainly told his story from beginning to end and Hazri again took the stand.

"The mystery of the papers lost by this man, Tom Jones, I can explain. My business man, in following various clues in connection with our interests, obtained the papers by forcibly taking them from Bainbridge, the detective. Those papers I now offer to this honorable court in order to justify the innocence of Cecil Vivian from any crime."

The package of papers was then opened and disclosed the missing certificates of the Golconda Gold-Mining Company, of Alameda, Cal. A few letters and private papers of Arnold Dacre's and a closely written MS. in the latter's handwriting confessed his share in the plot of Gould Dayton against his cousin, Cecil Vivian.

Whatever might have been the emotion of this man's life in general, one thing was positive: in two things Arnold Dacre was sincere, in his love for Mahel Clare and in the confession he had written.

He told the entire story of his misspent life—the story of the certificates of stock he had abstracted from the drawer of the president's desk upon the morning when Cecil Vivian had signed the genuine ones from one hundred and one to one hundred and ten inclusive, ten certificates in blank.

These latter he had secreted, designing to use them for his own purpose; the former he placed carelessly in his outer pocket with the list of the banks which he was to visit.

When he afterward found he had lost the ten original certificates he filled in those numbered from one hundred and ten to one hundred and twenty, and cleverly forged

the names of the president and secretary of the company, the seal having been placed upon them when Dayton was out of the office.

He therefore had vindicated Cecil Vivian completely by his confession.

That night Cecil Vivian and Colonel Andre were free men, free to go where they wished, free from stain or taint of guilt.

The detective, Bainbridge, had posted himself by the side of Gould Dayton, and as the testimony of the witness, Tom Jones, brought out his villainy and fastened the many crimes he had committed upon him he turned as if to escape.

"I arrest you, Gould Dayton, in the name of the law!" said Bainbridge, who immediately handcuffed his prisoner. An hour later Gould Dayton was an inmate of a prison cell. His crimes had at last found him out.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

Drawing to a close, the terminal chapter of our romance has little left to detail.

The reader may readily anticipate the events which, naturally occurring, placed the fortunes of Cecil Vivian upon a firm basis.

Gould Dayton, accused of murder, with plainly proven guilt against him, found his time cheerless and long in his prison cell.

In vain he attempted bribes, promises, cunning, in his endeavors to escape from jail.

Mutely he resigned himself to his fate and awaited the day of his trial sullenly, and with vague, suicidal thoughts spent the weary days in silent chafings of his restless spirit, the long nights in unrest and torture.

Tom Jones was not remanded to prison. His straightforward, honest work in behalf of right gained a respite from official sources and he went back to the mines of Alameda with a resolve to become a better man, for Cecil Vivian soon proved his claim as owner of the mines which he formerly occupied.

Ethel Wayne, sad but contented with the unraveling of the mystery which had so nearly wrecked her life, retired to a little suburb near New York and waited—waited with vague fear for the law to free her from the villain who called her wife.

The confession of Arnold Dacre that Cecil Vivian was free from any crime, that it was he who had driven past the Wayne mansion with the woman on that eventful day in the long ago, brought back her love for the one who was steadily regaining his position as a man among men.

The mission of the astrologer seemed ended, and by instructions received from the Brethren of the Blood he handed over to Colonel Andre the fortune intended for his lost daughter.

Mabel Clare remained in New York. Earnestly as she had grieved for her dead lover, she had found a rare and treasured friend in the colonel, whose sympathies for her hopeless condition soon found expression in an offer of marriage, long deferred; but finally accepted.

Despite the discrepancy in their years they lived happily together, tossed by the world in troubled waters, but knowing how to enjoy the calm of the peaceful haven into which, at last, a kind providence had led them.

One day the community was startled by the report of a most tragic ending to the Dacre-Dayton murder case.

Gould Dayton, leaving a confession acknowledging his own guilt and releasing Mr. Wayne from any participation in any plot or knowledge of the wrongs he had committed, died by his own hand.

Whence the prussic acid with which he ended his miserable existence came, no one knew. The empty bottle showed the method of his suicide.

There was a hurried inquest, the body was buried by the authorities, and thus forevermore settled the case of the people against Gould Dayton.

He made some startling acknowledgments in his confession.

He had shot Arnold Dacre and flung him into the pit that night, and Ethel Wayne was not his wife; he had been married to a Mexican woman years before and she was still living.

Ethel Wayne, free and still loving, heard the news gladly and her heart beat wildly as she dreamed of the possibility of happiness in the future.

At last the culmination of all her hopes came.

At last she was free from the man she hated and free to marry the man she loved. They had a quiet wedding, but jey reigned supreme, and her husband, now restored to his rightful position in society, and wealthy, was a model in his devotion, and their happiness was complete.

[THE END.]

Poison, or No Poison.

We were camping out in Australia and talking one night of ghosts, when I clapped my hands upon a leg of my trousers, for I felt something squirming next my skin.

"What is the matter?" demanded Brown.

"It strikes me," said I, "that a snake has run up my trousers-leg, and if I am not mistaken he is wriggling to get out the wrong way."

"Shake yourself and let him slide," my friend advised, but I preferred to hold on and to trust to chance and find out whether the reptile was of the poisonous species or the common green kind.

"Excuse me, but if you will light a match and a few leaves and then insert your hand up one of my trousers-legs I think that we can conquer the reptile."

"I will comply with your request, though I lose my life in accomplishing it," said Brown.

He hastily collected a few leaves, struck a match, and set fire to them. The flames gave sufficient light for the purpose, and in less than a minute's time Mr. Brown was ready to work.

"Steady with your hand," he said, as he passed his arm along my trousers-leg in search of the reptile. "In less than ten seconds we shall be either laughing or crying."

The snake, as though aware that its time was near, made a desperate attempt to escape, but I held fast, although I confess that the effort cost me more mental resolution than I ever exercised before, for the position in which I was situated was no envious one.

I felt the cold perspiration streaming down my face in large drops, and my heart beat as though it was attempting to force its way through my side and go into business on its own account, independent of the body.

"For heaven's sake, be quick!" I cried, fearing that I should faint before my friend accomplished his object.

"Patience—patience! don't get in a rage, for it will not help us. If the snake is of the poisonous species, a few seconds will not make much difference, and if the animal is harmless, were it not for the feeling of the thing, it might as well lodge in your trousers as in any other part of our camp-equipage. Don't jerk so—the thing has nerves as well as yourself."

Much more did Brown say, but I was in no humor to talk, or even to listen; and yet I can now frankly confess that if he had not made light of my misfortune I should have suffered ten times the amount of mental agony that I did. His jesting style of treating the affair was alone sufficient to make me keep up my spirits and imagine the matter as one of less importance than it really was.

"Now, then, are you ready?" cried Brown; and I felt the snake suddenly cease its gyrations and strive to effect its escape; but I held on with a hand of iron.

"When I say three do you let go suddenly," my friend exclaimed.

"I was only too willing."

"One! Two!"

It seemed an age between the monosyllables, yet I held on patiently.

"Three!"

I released my hold, and Brown with a quick movement of his hand drew out and dashed the reptile to the ground, then stamped upon it with his heavy boots.

"Now let us see what kind it is," he said, kicking it toward the fire.

A moment's examination and a hearty laugh set my fears at rest.

"You might have slept with a dozen beneath you and no harm would have happened. It is nothing but a green snake, and a small one too."

I could hardly believe the welcome news, and a personal inspection was necessary to convince me of the fact. A strong drink from my flask composed my nerves and rendered me a fit subject for sleep.

"Let me give you a word of advice," Brown said, joining me in the drink with wonderful alacrity. "Never again camp

out without seeing that the bottoms of your trousers are shoved tight into the tops of your boots. This simple precaution sometimes saves much trouble and suffering. I will drink again to your lucky escape."

"If you do, try the contents of your own bottle, for mine is running low."

Brown did not heed my request, and I had the satisfaction of hearing the liquor gurgling down his throat as though he liked it exceedingly.

When he did return the bottle he gave me more fatherly advice, which was to the effect that I should carry a larger flask during my travels if I expected to be successful in life and die happy.

TID-BITS.

"PRAY, Mr. Professor, what is a periphrasis?" "Madame, it is simply a circumlocutory cycle of oratorical soterity, circumscribing an atom of ideality, lost in verbal profundity." "Thank you, sir."

"THAT gun you sold me bursted the first time I fired it off," said an irate sportsman to Mr. Shott. "That's very strange," said the latter. "It never did so before. You must have been putting powder in it."

A KANSAS farmer purchased a revolver for his wife, and insisted on target practice, so that she could defend her house in case of his absence. After the bullet had been dug out of his leg, and the cow buried, he said he guessed that she'd better shoot with an ax.

The question arising in a Sunday-school as to why God created all the animals of the fields and sea and air before he created man, no one gave a solution of it until a little boy said: "I know; it's because he didn't want the man hanging around while he was making 'em."

SUGGS: "That mule of yours is a fine beast. What do you call him?" Blugge: "Fact." S.: "And what do you call the other?" B.: "Fact." S.: "What do you call 'em both Fact? How is that?" B.: "Why, you see, Facts are such stubborn things."

"Two and two never make more than four," said a public speaker. "Yes, they do!" cried a boy in the audience. "Perhaps our young friend will tell us when two and two make more than four." "When they're side by side, you old stupid—then they make twenty-two, don't they?"

AN inquisitive traveler, noticing that the man who sat beside him in the railroad car, had a band on his hat, observed: "I see you are in mourning. Was it a near or distant relative that you lost?" The bereaved one replied: "Wal, he was poety distant—'bout thirty miles or so by the turnpike."

"WHAT is the matter with you?" inquired a gentleman, who called to see his neighbor, a German, of Chicago. "Vell, I don't know—it is the gout; but vy should I have him?" "Perhaps," suggested his friend, "it is hereditary." "I think it is hereditary; I remember my wife's uncle have him."

A SCHOOL-BOARD inspector asked a small pupil of what the surface of the earth consists, and was promptly answered, "Land and water." He varied the question slightly, that the fact might be impressed on the boy's mind, and added: "What, then, do land and water make?" To which came the immediate response: "Mud."

A DUTCHMAN, in describing a pair of horses he had lost, said: "Day was fery much alike, specially the off one. Von lookt so much like poth I could not tell together from which; when I went after one I always catch the odder, and I whipped the one most dead because the other kicked me."

RATTLEBONE'S youngest boy is a genius. The other day he learned how to whistle, and in the evening, just before tumbling into bed, he puckered up his little mouth and began to whistle in a slow, measured manner. "Why, my little son, what are you doing?" asked the mother. "Why, ma, I'm whistling my prayers."

AFTER the circus parade two small boys met on the street. One of them, his face glowing with excitement, said: "Oh, Johnny! did you see that fellow with the snakes around his neck?" No word from Johnny. "Yer seen the man in the lion's cage, in course?" No word or sign from Johnny, save and except a cloud upon his brow. "Well, yer seen the ponies with the red blankets on, didn't yer?" "Naw, an' I

didn't," said Johnny, at last, bursting into tears. "I had to stay at home and tend our baby, but I kin lick the stuffin' out of you!"

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